

**Turning Goth in Japan:
Subcultural Identity, Ritual, and Self-Expression**

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Turning Goth in Japan: Subcultural Identity, Ritual, and Self-Expression

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Originally imported from the U.K. in the late 1970s, Goth subculture in Japan encompasses musical styles, fashions, symbols, and forms of body modification that many people may find morbid, sinister, or unhealthy. What then prompts hundreds of young to middle-aged Japanese individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to gather at Goth events in Tokyo and Osaka every week to embrace this dark subculture? Unusual fashion and body modifications can adversely affect employment and marriage opportunities for people in Japan, and thus Goth may be seen as a negative influence in the lives of such individuals. However, I argue that Goth subculture provides an alternative identity that allows individuals in Japan to channel, express, and come to terms with negative emotions and experiences of alienation and isolation, which otherwise have few socially sanctioned outlets in Japan's mainstream society. This research examines the lives of twenty individuals in Tokyo and Osaka from a cultural anthropological perspective to explore how Goth offers fulfillment and meaning through fashion, community, and, sometimes, self-transformative ritual in the form of body modification. I also explain how the persistence and permanence of Goth identity throughout the lives of my informants has broader implications in Japan's contemporary society, where increasing numbers of individuals seek fulfillment outside of the established norms of success that have existed until now, and how Goth offers a model of how subcultures may function in Japan in the future.

論文撮要

在日本成為哥德：
次文化身份，儀式及自我表現

SKUTLIN, John Michael

日本的哥德次文化最初于 1970 年代末由英國傳入，其內容涵蓋了音樂風格，時尚潮流，符號象徵，以及身體改造的形式。大多數人將這一次文化看作是恐怖，邪惡，且病態的。然而，又是什麼吸引了數以百計具有不同社會和經濟地位的日本年輕人乃至中年人每週聚集在東京和大阪的哥德活動並欣然接受這一黑暗次文化的洗禮的呢？在日本，不同尋常的時尚風格以及身體改造會為人們求職及婚姻帶來負面影響，哥德次文化也不例外。然而，筆者認為哥德次文化為其中的個體提供了一種替代的身份，使他們能夠將那些難以通過日本主流社會認可的形式發洩出來的負面情緒以及疏離感和孤獨感，藉由這一次文化表達出來並最終接受它們。本研究將以文化人類學的視角來剖析身在東京和大阪的 20 位個體的生活，以探尋哥德次文化是如何通過時尚潮流、社交活動、以及某些情況下的以身體改造為表現形式的自我改革儀式為他們帶來滿足感和價值的。現今的日本社會中愈來愈多的人試圖擺脫固有的對於成功的定義，憑藉其他的方式來實現個人抱負。筆者將以自己的報導人的生活為例來解釋哥德身份認同感的持續性和永久性是如何對日本現代社會產生更深遠的影響。同時，次文化未來將會以怎樣的方式在日本社會中發揮作用？筆者將進一步闡述哥德次文化是如何為此提供範例的。

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Introduction

The place is Osaka, Japan. Walking down the darkened streets of Shinsaibashi, the smell of *takoyaki* octopus balls wafts into your nostrils, and around the corner you find a quaint shrine that peeks out from between the storefronts that neighbor it on either side. Yes, you think, this is Japan. As you walk further, however, you notice a heavier concentration of fashionable young people in brand-name apparel, and a wider range of shops selling everything from hip-hop clothing to a considerable array of body piercing supplies. Before long, something seems...different. Have the streetlamps somehow grown dimmer in this area? As you quicken your step, you notice a part of the narrow street ahead that somehow appears *darker* than the places around it. You realize that all of the people gathered in front of the stairway leading down into the dim recesses of a nightclub are clad almost entirely in black. Whitened faces and smoldering eyes peer out from among smoky black liner and hooded shrouds. You catch glimpses of S&M accoutrements, glittering piercings in almost every place imaginable, and ominous tattoos depicting occult symbols that stand out darkly against exposed white flesh. Sepulchral tunes ring out from the depths of the nightclub, and you almost expect Dracula to appear in a swirling cape. You have just stumbled across one of Japan's imported underground subcultures: Goth¹.

Japan has developed a small but thriving Goth subculture, which is both a subculture and a lifestyle incorporating a multifarious array of musical genres, fashion styles, and general aesthetic sensibilities that are commonly regarded as dark, morbid,

¹ In Japanese, this term is written in *katakana* as ゴス (pronounced *gosu*), and is directly imported from the English.

or associated with death and what may often be regarded as evil. The subculture originated with a post-punk musical style in the U.K. and was imported to Tokyo as early 1980, maintaining a steady core of adherents ever since. Based on my own observations and reports from event organizers, I would estimate that in the Tokyo area alone there are at least 200 regular event-goers who could be strictly categorized as traditional Goths, with many others who embrace aspects of the subculture and participate in subcultural related activities on a fairly frequent basis. Of course, there are other Goth enclaves in Osaka, Nagoya, and elsewhere throughout the country. Goth also refers to the individuals (Goths) who participate in that subculture, regardless of whether or not they voluntarily label themselves as such. For those well versed in the popular culture of present-day Japan, the description in the opening paragraph may actually sound rather familiar. Although it is not the focus of this study, since at least 1999 Gothic Lolita² fashion has grown out of Goth to become a staple feature of the fashion-conscious teen crowd in Tokyo's ultra-hip Harajuku district, and its influence can be witnessed in numerous popular manga and anime ranging from Yazawa Ai's *Paradise Kiss* to Toboso Yana's *Black Butler*. Dark makeup and theatrical costumes are also the bread and butter of the dramatically costumed Japanese rock musicians of visual kei³ (Gothic Lolita owes much of its origins to a particular visual kei band), a musical genre that is just as much about fantastic appearances as it is music. Many of its fans imitate their style, and even

² Also known simply as Gothic Lolita (ゴシック・ロリィタ/ゴシック・ロリータ [goshikku rorīta] or GothLoli [ゴスロリ [gosurori], this usually female fashion style adds a darker color scheme to the Victorian-era elements of Lolita fashion and was pioneered by musician and designer Mana of the band Malice Mizer (1992-2001). The history of Gothic Lolita is described in more detail in Chapter 1.

³ "Visual kei" is Japanese coinage referencing musicians of numerous rock genres that are characterized by flamboyant and intricate costumes and elaborate androgynous makeup. The genre originated in the early 1980s under the influence of glam rock, positive punk, and heavy metal, and continues to this day.

cosplay⁴ as their favorite artists. What is important to recognize, however, is that these musical and sartorial styles owe their existence in many ways to the gothic rock and the subculture that formed around it, and there are still many people in Japan who claim an identity based on the more traditional Goth subculture as it was shaped in Europe and the U.S. While Goth and Gothic Lolita are only marginal subcultures embraced by a relatively small number of people in Japan, their influence on various media, such as anime, manga, and film, can be easily observed. In this paper, I will explain how Goth subculture (and the musical genre upon which it was based) were influential in the development of such well-known features of Japan's popular culture as Gothic Lolita and visual kei, and also examine the individuals who often reject those homegrown manifestations as superficial and inauthentic. They are the people who wear their chosen fashions in daily life and shape their appearance and personal environments to meet the dark aesthetic that they claim as an identity. They perceive themselves as being "abnormal," or at the very least different from the Gothic Lolitas and cosplayers that they see as following a temporary trend. They also find a community within which to explore their interests and enjoy the opportunity to express their passions more fully.

⁴ Cosplay (コスプレ [*kosupure*]), a Japanese contraction of "costume play," involves dressing up as a character, usually a notable popular culture figure (such as anime or manga characters).



Figure 1 – Goth fashion on display at a club in Tokyo. Photos by La Carmina. Used with permission.

While words like ‘dark’ are used by participants to describe Goth subculture in Japan, a brief explanation of the term ‘Goth’ and its origins is in order.⁵ The word

⁵ This will be explained in greater detail below.

Goth,⁶ of course, has its roots in ‘Gothic.’ From the East Germanic tribes known as the Visigoths and Ostrogoths and the imposing arches and vaults of the Medieval European architecture pejoratively named after them, to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature steeped in supernatural horror and the macabre films that eventually visualized them on the silver screen, the term ‘Gothic’ has had a long and complicated history. The word Gothic may conjure up images of Notre-Dame-like cathedrals, or perhaps vampires skulking amidst moldering tombs as bats fly across a gibbous moon hanging over the broken battlements of a medieval castle. It is perhaps just as likely, however, that white makeup, heavy black eyeliner, torn fishnets, and spiked collars will come to mind when Gothic, or its abbreviated form, Goth, comes up in casual conversation. In fact, this stereotypical image of black-clad, pale-faced ghouls lurking about nightclubs and shopping malls has its origins in gothic rock, a musical genre that developed out of the U.K. postpunk or positive punk scenes during the late 1970s. Borrowing imagery and lyrical inspiration from horror films and literature, the gothic rock genre was pioneered by musical acts like Bauhaus, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The Cure, and eventually developed a devoted following of ‘Goths’ who adopted their favorite bands’ fashions and aesthetics in their nightly outings and often throughout their daily lives.

Goth went on to become a fascinating U.K. subculture in its own right, and it persists to this day, even after its major media exposure in the 1980s ended. Not only that, but the subculture has flourished across Europe, in the U.S., and, to a lesser

⁶ Throughout the text, I have chosen to capitalize the word “Goth.” While many scholars and authors (Goodlad and Bibby 2007, Hodkinson 2002, etc.) choose to keep the term lowercase, sometimes, presumably, to distinguish between the subculture and the original tribal peoples and language, I have chosen to follow the pattern set by other scholars (Brill 2008, Siegel 2005, etc.) in capitalizing it. Through capitalization, I wish to emphasize that when I speak of Goth it is not as an adjective, but as a noun referring to a wide-ranging subculture that can encompass fashion, music, film, and various activities, and also to denote those who identify with it. I use “Gothic” to refer to the art, literature, and architecture associated with the term, and leave “gothic rock,” etc. without capitalization as is common for most established musical genres. Following the example of most English publications, I keep “Gothic Lolita” capitalized.

degree, Japan. “In its most basic sense,” says Micah L. Issitt, a researcher of marginal subgroups in the U.S., “Goth consists of a group of people who celebrate and indulge in darker elements of style, sound, and other aesthetic avenues” (2011, xi). Pioneering Goth subculture researcher Paul Hodkinson has also pointed out that Goth in the U.K. could be distinguished by at least four factors that define it as a subculture, which include a consistent distinctiveness of style and symbolism that is instantly recognizable, a sense of identity among the participants, a firm commitment to a particular lifestyle, and a relatively high degree of autonomy from media and the market (2002, 30-33).

Although there is comparatively less awareness of Goth subculture in Japan and Asia as a whole, the scene described at the outset of this paper begs the question, “What makes Goth subculture, which often plays a large role in identity formation, so appealing to its participants in Japan, where social acceptance is so often based on conformance to lifestyle ideals of marriage, family, and full-time employment with a company?” The first Japanese Goth (known at the time as ‘positive punk’) bands were formed as early as 1980, and Tokyo’s maiden Goth event space, Club Walpurgis, first opened its doors in 1983, holding two events every week. While the rate of activities has vacillated throughout the years, such bands and clubs continue to this day, and despite various economic, social, and political factors, they show no sign of slowing down. Even the appearance of mainstream fashion styles, such as the Japan-originated Gothic Lolita and visual kei, have done little to dilute the identities of Goth participants in Japan, who firmly and enthusiastically embrace this imported subculture. As mentioned previously, Gothic Lolita, with its combination of frilly Victorian doll style with darker elements such as bats and coffins, and visual kei are highly visible in Japan’s mainstream media. It is this association with mainstream

popular culture and the ready availability of prêt-à-porter, premade fashion identities that rankle many inveterate Goths in Japan, whose claims to originality and authenticity often rely on a self-professed independence from consumer culture. Nevertheless, Gothic Lolita and visual kei are intricately connected with Goth subculture, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 1.

In terms of identity, Goth in Japan can be viewed as simply another lifestyle choice in the age of globalization. How then, is it different from other subcultures in Japan? Unlike many subcultures that focus on clothing and fashion, or some combination of the two, Goth is a subculture that encompasses various genres of music as well as literature and film that are yet united by a certain dark aesthetic most visibly recognized in fashion. More importantly, however, is the growing prominence of permanent body modification⁷ within the subculture (discussed in Chapter 3) and the lifelong identity professed by my informants, which contrasts with other Japanese subcultures that do not necessarily entail lifetime commitment and, sometimes, incorporate an institutionalized “graduation” from the subculture. A split tongue, a tattoo, or even a stretched earlobe can have significant consequences when seeking employment in Japan. As such, the choice of Goth identity may not be free of consequences in terms of individuals’ standing vis-à-vis society. It is thus necessary to more fully understand what is going on in the lives of the people who make up the subculture, and discover Goth can have both positive and negative effects on such individuals. As one may infer from Goth subculture’s more than thirty-year history in Japan, individuals range in age from their teens to mid-fifties, with varying levels of

⁷ In this paper, I define permanent body modifications as tattoos, scarification, branding, stretching, micro-dermal/transdermal/subdermal implants, and amputations. Piercings may be permanent or nonpermanent depending on their nature, but they usually leave some trace even after removal. I consider suspension, saline injections, and temporary piercings as performance art to be nonpermanent body modifications. Cosmetic surgeries and treatments, while also forms of body modification, are generally not thought of as art and usually are meant to enhance a feature or correct an existing defect, and thus are not considered in this paper.

education and socioeconomic status. I was struck by the immense diversity that I found among Goth participants, which almost made me hesitate to categorize them under a single label. What they share in common is a set of subcultural values that are deemed to be at variance with those of the larger mainstream culture surrounding them. Fetish and S&M performances, extreme body modification, and heavy use of Western occult and Satanic imagery are common, and what they mean to individuals must be understood in historically and (sub)culturally specific terms. As will be explained in this study, especially in the case of body modification, the cultural and social climate of Japan generates implications for Goth participation that are different from the countries in which Goth originated.

Moreover, this paper explores what makes Goth subculture appealing specifically to individuals in Japan's society. While current literature on Gothic Lolita fashion and visual kei music often focuses on fashion communities and fan culture (Kawamura 2012, Inoue 2003, etc.) the intention of this research is to dig deeper and conceptualize how and why Goth subculture in Japan, which has centered on music, fashion, and clubs since the early 1980s, provides a source of identity for those who feel themselves alienated, isolated, or otherwise unable, or unwilling, to integrate into the mainstream social circles (at school, work, etc.) around them, and to elucidate the various ways in which the subculture provides meaning and fulfillment in their lives. In Japan, specifically, Goth has an exoticism and foreignness that makes it attractive especially to those who find themselves dissatisfied with the culture and society they grew up in, and the sometimes restrictive school and work settings in Japan. The numerous fashion subcultures among youth in Japan are indicative of the transformations that its society is undergoing and how young people cope with them. Goth subculture is more than just a fashion, and it involves individuals from across

the generational spectrum. Encompassing musical styles, fashions, symbols, and forms of body modification that many people may find morbid, sinister, or unhealthy, in this paper I argue that Goth subculture in Japan provides an alternative identity that allows individuals to channel, express, and come to terms with negative emotions and experiences of alienation and isolation, which otherwise have few socially sanctioned outlets in Japan's mainstream society.

Significance of Research on Goth in Japan

There are four major factors that make studying Goth subculture in Japan a significant and worthwhile pursuit: 1) Although a fair amount of research has been conducted on Goth subculture in Europe and the U.S. (Brill 2008, Hodkinson 2002, Issitt 2011, etc.), there has been comparatively little work on Goth subcultures outside of these areas, particularly in Asia; 2) Within Asia, Japan has the highest concentration of Goth-related bands, events, and fashion brands, many of which have achieved global recognition; 3) Japan has been increasingly viewed by scholars as the center of a new mode of cultural globalization that has a powerful influence on flows of popular culture in Asia and throughout the world (Iwabuchi 2002); 4) The reasons that individuals find fulfillment and meaning in Goth subculture also reflect larger trends in Japan.

To understand the significance of studying Goth subculture in Japan, it is necessary to have an overall image of its members. There is certainly some difficulty in defining the extent of something as fluctuating and polymorphous as a subculture, but it may be safely said that Goth spans a wide spectrum of individuals, ranging from high school students to quinquagenarians, who occupy almost every kind of job, from civil servants to professional body piercers. In cities like Tokyo and Osaka, a Goth or

Goth-related event takes place somewhere on almost a weekly basis, each drawing anywhere from thirty to three hundred attendees. In this paper, I focus on twenty informants⁸ that I interviewed, who were mostly long-time participants in Japan's Goth subculture and, according to them, had all been born and raised in that country. The ages of my informants ranged from twenty-three to fifty-five, with eight between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine, four between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine, six between the ages of forty and forty-nine, and two between the ages of fifty and fifty-nine. As one can readily see, multiple generations are represented among Goth subculture in Japan, and while there are slightly more members who have not reached middle age, this does not negate the fact that there are core members who have refused to hang up their proverbial capes and leave Goth subculture, even into their fifties. With regard to sex, thirteen of my informants were female, six were male, and one was transsexual (formerly biologically male). From my own experience and participant observation, I would venture to say that this rather adequately reflects the general male-female distribution in Japan's Goth subculture, although a look at the data on my informants also reflects the fact that males are more likely to occupy the more influential positions within the scene, such as members of major bands and organizers of large-scale events.

In terms of education, exactly half, or ten, of my informants had graduated from senior high school as their highest level of education, while one-quarter, or five, had gained some form of one- or two-year higher education from an art or technical/vocational school. The remaining quarter had earned bachelor's degrees in four-year colleges. This again reflects my general observations of Japan's Goth subculture. Individuals on the extreme ends of the spectrum (i.e., those with only

⁸ My cross-section of informants is explained in detail Table 1 in the Appendix.

junior high school credentials and those with postgraduate degrees) appear to be quite rare, and there seems to be a rather even distribution ranging from senior high school to undergraduate degrees among those in Japan's Goth subculture. As Brill (2008) pointed out, "Many of its collectively shared fields of interests – e.g. literature, poetry, fine art, history – mark Goth as an unusually educated and literate subculture" (9), and this certainly bears out in my observations of Goth subculture in Japan as well. In terms of employment, nineteen of the twenty were currently employed in some form or another, and four of them claimed to be living exclusively off of jobs directly related to the subculture.

Given the fact that roughly ninety percent of Japanese perceive themselves as being "middle-class" (Sugimoto 2003, 35), and also because I chose not to ask informants about sensitive issues such as gross income, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty where my informants fall in terms of socioeconomic class. However, knowledge of their employment types and the estimates of how much they spent on subculture-related activities lead me to conclude, as other scholars (Brill 2008, Hodkinson 2002, etc.) concluded of Goths in Europe and the U.S., that individuals in Japan's Goth subculture are primarily working- to middle-class. Given the importance of class in terms of the wider implications of my study, this topic will also be discussed throughout the paper.

In this paper, I use a cultural anthropological approach to describe Goth subculture in Japan through the lens of the individuals mentioned above who have been involved in the subculture from its start in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and younger participants who have only recently discovered the small but flourishing Goth scene in Japan's larger cities. Take, for example, one of my informants by the

name of Ai⁹. Since a young age she has been interested in heavy rock acts, and took a particular liking to shock rocker Marilyn Manson in her high school years. Now 23, she claims that her wardrobe is entirely black, and when I first met her for an interview she sported heavily pierced ears and several facial piercings (and was contemplating a tattoo next). Ai started working immediately out of high school in various part-time jobs, residing with her parents in a suburban area of Tokyo and making enough disposable income to support her fashion tastes and penchant for Goth events, which she discovered through a flyer she noticed in one of her favorite boutiques. From such humble beginnings she soon became a model for S&M fetish performances, learned how to DJ, and even co-hosted her own Goth event. At the time of the interview, she worked as a clerk at a pharmacy owned by her father and hid her piercings behind a facemask¹⁰; however, upon my second interview with her, she had quit the job and was working as a cabaret club¹¹ hostess, citing higher pay¹² and more flexible working days as her incentives. When I asked her about whether she would eventually quit her Goth activities and find a husband, she said, “I don’t think about the future – I just try to enjoy the present. I think I’ll be Goth for life.”

What can we make of Ai’s continued dedication to Goth subculture, which involves a very distinctive way of dressing and (sometimes) permanent body modifications? Refusal to graduate from subcultures and engage in traditional lifestyle choices of employment, marriage, and childbirth might be viewed as symptomatic of a contemporary society that is deteriorating on a fundamental level. Is

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, informant names given are pseudonyms and details have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

¹⁰ Sometimes known as surgical masks, such facemasks are commonly worn in daily life in Japan, as they are believed to prevent the spread of diseases.

¹¹ For an anthropological study of such clubs in Japan, see Allison, Anne. 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹² Based on my conversations with women working at hostess clubs and fetish bars, I have found that pay rates range anywhere from 2,000 yen to 6,000 yen (approximately 20 to 60 U.S. dollars) per hour. This does not include occasional tips, gifts, and meals from customers. (Exchange rate is current as of May 4, 2014).

her choice to engage in night work,¹³ with its association with the sex industry and less socially acceptable forms of employment, a result of her decision to become “Goth for life?” Although my overall view of Goth is as a source of fulfillment and meaning in the lives of many individuals, I must also acknowledge the double-edged sword that subculture can be for individuals in Japan. As described in the case of Ai above, four of my female informants under the age of thirty (including Ai), while claiming to be satisfied with their positions, have been doing night work to better accommodate their subcultural predilections. It could be argued that Goth is, in fact, drawing emotionally unstable individuals away from healthy education, work, and possible psychiatric help, and instead driving them into dead-end careers that will leave them single and jobless in the end. In this paper, I argue that such night work is not necessarily a dead end, that it is possible (though not necessarily easy) to balance a well-paying career and family with a Goth lifestyle, and, moreover, that the informants I encountered in such employment situations had little choice due to class-dependent educational backgrounds that were not a result of their turn to Goth (particularly since three of the four had only graduated high school, while one had attended junior college). I argue that Goth is not to blame, and rather the subculture draws in people from a broad socioeconomic range that often find ways of balancing their subcultural pursuits with their mainstream professions and families. Due to its heavy overlap with clubs and bars, Goth in Japan also allows members who are already being channeled into night work to access satisfying positions within the subculture. While potentially limiting upward mobility in mainstream society, Goth in Japan provides such individuals with fulfillment and meaning in their lives. Encompassing musical styles, fashions, symbols, and forms of body modification that

¹³ More specifically, I am referring to *mizu-shōbai* (literally, “the water trade”), which is often associated with sex work in Japan, but can also include work at bars or pubs that operate late hours.

many people may find dark, morbid, sinister, or unhealthy, Goth subculture provides an identity that allows individuals to channel, express, and come to terms with negative emotions and experiences of alienation and isolation, which otherwise have few socially sanctioned outlets in Japan's mainstream society. Amid the political, economic, and demographic uncertainty that define contemporary Japan, Goth subculture may represent an example of how individuals who feel or are marginalized for various reasons might increasingly turn to subculture for fulfillment in the future.

In order to comprehend the internal dynamics of the subculture, it is necessary to have a range of analytical tools. Goths negotiate their identities in terms of 'subcultural capital,' a Bourdieu-influenced concept developed by Sarah Thornton in her study of raver subcultures in Great Britain and the U.S. that describes how "subcultures tend to create their own codes of prestige that supplant those of the 'parent' culture" (1995, 172). Also important to understand is Goth's subcultural ideology, another of Thornton's concepts, which refers to the perception of subcultural participants that their actions and choices within a subculture are effectively resistant against a constructed 'other,' namely, the mainstream or dominant culture. After a brief history of Goth, these concepts and other scholarly works relevant to this paper will be discussed in the Literature Review section.

Later, in the Methodology section, I will discuss my ethnographic approach to Goth subculture in Japan, having closely examined the lives of twenty Goth participants in the Tokyo and Kansai areas of Japan. I found that Goth subculture in Japan offers a valuable form of community and source of affirmation for those who echo one informant's sentiment that "Goth is my life," and those who believe that their ebony garments, elaborate makeup, and preoccupation with the macabre and often grotesque are merely outward indicators of a natural-born disposition. In fact,

what some may see as an alarming predilection for BDSM¹⁴ accoutrements, fetish performances, and (sometimes extreme) forms of body modification are often a part of the ritualized expression of self-transformative drama within a subcultural ideology that espouses freedom and individuality. There are, of course, limitations, delusions, and self-aggrandizement. The identity of being ‘different’ can be problematic, especially when one is adhering to a well-defined aesthetic repertoire. There is also the danger of alienation from mainstream employment and even marriage opportunities. However, I argue through this paper that Goth does indeed offer an outlet for positive self-expression in the lives of the individuals that I interviewed, and was not necessarily a negative influence on their lives.

Ironically, by embracing the status of someone who is different from the mainstream, Goths become bonded to a community where they often find support. By bedecking themselves in black and death-themed accoutrements, they affirm life and enjoyment of the present. By inking, piercing, and scarring their bodies, many claim to gain enjoyment and emotional stability. The participant observation research detailed in my Methodology section offered me a glimpse into this seemingly paradoxical world of Goth subculture in Japan, and I argue that Goth identity, while often claimed as a positive element by those who profess it, is also reflective of an ever-growing discontent with more traditional forms of cultural and social capital and a rejection of the values of Japanese society, a trend which may be observed in other subcultures and among members of mainstream society as well. At the end of this Introduction I will provide the structure of the thesis. First of all, however, it would be appropriate to give a brief history of Goth and how it developed into a subculture that has reached all the way to the heart of Japan.

¹⁴ A compound acronym usually understood as standing for “Bondage & Discipline” and “Sadism & Masochism.”

Goth Subculture from West to East

As described above, the term Goth (a shortened form of Gothic) has origins that reach back nearly two millennia to the Ostrogoths and Visigoths (known collectively as the Goths), Germanic tribes that ravaged Europe in the second and third centuries CE and played an instrumental role in bringing about the fall of the Roman Empire. It was these barbarian hordes, and the devastation left in their wake, that Renaissance intellectuals had in mind when they pejoratively applied the label of ‘Gothic’ to the pointed arches, flying buttresses, and ribbed vaults of medieval European architecture, a style that brought about the end of the Romanesque. In a period when Roman and Greek cultures were hailed as the peak of human civilization, the dark and heavy cathedrals and castles built in the elaborate Gothic style were perceived as nothing less than the uncultured products of an unenlightened age (Baddeley 2002, 10-11).

The late seventeenth-century period of the Enlightenment following the Renaissance inevitably incited a backlash in the form of Romanticism, involving art, literature, and thought that asserted the ascendancy of strong emotional feeling and the sublimity of the natural world in rejection of the cold, rational, empiricism of the Age of Reason. Works featuring the supernatural and explorations of horror and terror soon became their own subgenre, and due to a combination of their eldritch themes, stories set in hoary medieval castles and cathedrals, their association with the sublime, they eventually came to be known as Gothic literature (Baddeley 2002, 12). The connection with the dark and morbid themes of the Gothic was certainly not lost on the authors themselves – Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), widely regarded as the first Gothic novel, even bears the subtitle of “A Gothic Story” on its title page. The self-conscious and sometimes even self-parodying nature of Gothic

literature continued into the nineteenth century, producing many works such as *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818) and *Dracula* (Bram Stoker, 1897) that would go on to be incarnated numerous times on the silver screen with the advent of film technology. It was on celluloid that those Gothic stories reached an even wider audience in the form of Universal Studios' classic black-and-white horror films from the 1930s, and later in the brilliantly garish Technicolor pictures of Hammer Film Productions in the U.K. from the 1950s.

From Germanic tribes and medieval architecture to horror literature and film, Gothic has had a long and convoluted history, to say the least. However, the contemporary subculture known as 'Goth' has much more recent origins in something else entirely: music. As mentioned earlier, Goth, or more specifically, gothic rock, rose from the declining punk scene in the late 1970s. To be precise, however, the first nascent signs of Goth can be found a decade earlier in the 1960s, when American rock band The Doors brought a slight darker edge and introspective lyrics to their signature blend of psychedelic rock. Also key in the germinal stages of Goth's formation was the influence of glam rockers such as David Bowie, whose androgynous beauty, flamboyant stage personas, and elaborate makeup set a precedent for the elegant theatrical style that Goth would later take. While punk was a highly political and polemical musical genre and subculture pioneered by such bands as The Sex Pistols in the U.K., a group of bands appeared in the late seventies whose lyrics were often sorrowful, poetic, and deeply introspective, expressing an aesthetic that was highly reminiscent of the literary prose of the Romantic movement and, of course, the Gothic. It was this fact, combined with the ghostly white makeup and stark black eyeliner, predilection for black attire, and horror-themed theatrics that eventually caused critics to dub the burgeoning post-punk genre 'gothic rock.' In fact,

Steven ‘Abbo’ Abbott, front man of pioneering postpunk band UK Decay, described his band’s music as a “gothic thing,” thus contributing to the labeling of the genre (Issitt 2011, 83).

While experts seem unable to reach a consensus on which band was the first to epitomize gothic rock, most agree that the ‘godfather of goth’ Peter Murphy and his band, Bauhaus (formed in 1978), crystallized the gothic sound and look with their first single, “Bela Lugosi’s Dead” (1979). Other bands appearing around the same time also cemented the features of gothic rock. Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie and the Banshees (formed in 1976) incorporated various S&M-related accoutrements into her extravagant wardrobe, while the melancholy lyrics and suicide of Ian Curtis, frontman of Joy Division (formed in 1976), firmly entrenched gothic rock’s sense of pathos and Thanatos. The prominence of images from classic horror films based on Gothic tales in such bands’ album covers and promotional work also cemented the association between the Gothic tradition and this new genre of music.

While the shift from punk to postpunk/gothic genre was taking place in the U.K. in the late 1970s and early 1980s, keen listeners of *yōgaku* (Western music) in Japan were already importing and adapting the echoing vocals, jangling guitars, and tribal drumbeats of early gothic rock in their own musical ensembles. While the word gothic was being thrown around in the Western media, terms such as ‘postpunk’ and ‘positive punk’ were still in parlance in the U.K., and it was this latter term that was picked up by a Japanese journalist and came to be cemented in Japan’s music press.¹⁵ As early as 1980, Japan saw the formation of the two giants of Tokyo’s *pojipan* (positive punk) scene: Auto-Mod and Madame Edwarda.

¹⁵ This information was obtained from Auto-Mod frontman Genet (name used with permission) in an interview with the author in May 2013.

Fans in Japan would gather to see their favorite artists at ‘live houses’ and other concert venues, but in order to provide a space for music aficionados to enjoy multiple bands and emulate the fashions of their favorite artists, it was perhaps only natural for a regularly operating positive punk club to be born. As mentioned above, the first “gothic punk club” was dubbed Club Walpurgis, and first opened its doors to the darkly inclined in Tokyo in 1983, and was hosted by the leader of Madame Edwarda, Zin-François Angélique (a Japanese national, despite the exotic pseudonym). At its peak the club was open twice each week, with each night focusing on different genres of music falling under the positive punk/gothic, new wave, and gothic punk categories, and while it has become less frequent, the event continues to be held several times annually. Auto-Mod (fronted by the eccentric Genet) also saw great success in the early 1980s, with numerous sold-out performances in the underground scene.¹⁶

¹⁶ This information was obtained from Zin-François Angélique (name used with permission) in an interview with the author in May 2013.



Figure 2 – Flyer for a 1985 Auto-Mod concert, “Housel Legend”

By the mid- to late 1980s, the media popularity of UK gothic rock bands such as The Cure, All About Eve, The Mission, and Fields of the Nephilim saw a decline, and this was also reflected in Japan, as bands like X (later X Japan, formed in 1982) brought heavy and progressive metal into the mainstream while the darker deathrock sounds of *pojipan* fell by the wayside. Auto-Mod discontinued its activities in 1985 (to resume again in 1997), and Madame Edwarda also went into a hiatus in the same year, although Zin continued other projects on an irregular basis until the band’s reformation in 2009. Other bands disappeared into the mists of time, and club events became scarce. At the same time, Japan’s bubble economy had completely burst by

1991, and rising rent prices left small-time musicians and DJs with less financially feasible recourse to venues to practice, record, and hold club events.¹⁷

Nonetheless, a subculture had already been formed – one which centered on not only a musical genre and fashion, but on a shared aesthetic sense and lifestyle that bonded its members together with or without formal events. Club events continued to pick up steam both in Tokyo and Osaka, and it seemed that the turn of the millennium, as it had a century earlier with Gothic literature, was sending its electrical currents into the dormant corpse of Goth to revivify the subculture beyond the year 2000. While Goths in the U.S. faced discrimination and misunderstanding in the wake of the Columbine High School massacre in April 1999¹⁸, subcultural participants in Japan were witnessing an increased presence of Goth in the media, particularly in the form of Gothic Lolita fashion and the elaborate theatrics of visual kei music artists. Genet reformed his band Auto-Mod in 1997 and started his own Tokyo club event in 2000 called Tokyo Goth & Darkwave (reorganized in 2003 as Tokyo Dark Castle). The following year saw the formation of Black Veil, Osaka's premier Goth club, and in 2002, a S&M mistress and *kinbaku*¹⁹ expert by the name of Maya started Midnight★Mess, the longest-running monthly Goth club in Tokyo. Numerous other club events operate in the Tokyo and Osaka areas, and various ‘fusion’ events also draw in Goth subculture participants as well. While there are no exact numbers to be found of those who identify with Goth subculture in Japan, my own experience has introduced me to hundreds of people who attend such events.

¹⁷ Indicated by Zin-François Angélique and Genet in interviews with the author, May 2013.

¹⁸ On April 20, 1999, high school students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered Columbine High School with numerous weapons and explosive devices, killing twelve students and one teacher and injuring another twenty-four students before committing suicide. In the moral panic that followed, the media mistakenly labeled them as Goths.

¹⁹ *Kinbaku* is the traditional Japanese art of erotic rope binding, which is often featured in Goth and Goth-related events.

It can be seen that Goth subculture in Japan has been resilient in continuing across more than three decades, relying on music and images imported from the U.S. and Europe, but also developing independently in various forms of music, fashion, and club culture. In the following section I describe the theoretical background for my investigation into this fascinating subculture, which I explore in terms of cultural identity from a cultural anthropological perspective.

Literature Review

This literature review will cover two major areas of academic study. First, the term Goth will be defined as described in academic and non-academic literature. Second, the concept of subculture and its theoretical underpinnings will be discussed in the contexts of Europe, the U.S., and Japan. Then, I will discuss the broad concepts of globalization and cultural identity, consumption and creation, permanence and temporality, and subculture and socioeconomic class in terms of how they relate to subculture and Japan's Goth subculture in particular. The study of subculture has been around since at least the 1950s, coming into prominence in the 1970s when the punk movement became the subject of scholarly scrutiny in the UK. Goth has been the subject of academic study in European countries and the US since at least 2001, but no ethnographic studies have been made on the subculture's manifestations in Asia. While fashion subcultures in Japan are a recent topic of study, the focus is on the clothing and fluid nature of identity among the young women who engage in them. As my research focuses on Goth subculture in Japan, I will concentrate on Goth and subculture in this literature review, with sufficient examples from studies on Japanese subcultures as well.

Defining Goth

In the previous section I attempted to briefly summarize the answer to the question: *What is Goth?* These words are both a profound inquiry and the title of Cuban-American musician Voltaire's (2004) tongue-in-cheek tome, which uses humor and wit to describe a music- and fashion-based subculture that has evolved from the punk and postpunk musical movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Numerous books aimed at a general readership have been penned in an attempt to nail down the lid of the remarkably polymorphous coffin that is 'Goth' (Baddeley 2002, Kilpatrick 2004, Thompson, 2002, V enters 2009, Voltaire 2004 and 2005). In my research on Goth, I decided to use not only academic sources that investigated the subculture in terms of overarching theories, but also to approach what one might call the insider works on Goth, i.e. books that are often written by people with a personal investment in the subculture and meant to elucidate the tenebrous depths of Goth for neophytes or interested non-initiates. It would seem only appropriate to begin with a book that, from its very title, seems to promise both a descriptive and prescriptive exploration of Goth subculture, Nancy Kilpatrick's *The Goth Bible* (2004).

Based on 95 anonymous respondents to a 125-question survey and numerous interviews with key and specialized informants, novelist Kilpatrick's work provides a very useful glimpse at what a cross-section of European and North American Goths think about themselves and their subculture. Deep or theoretical analyses are not to be found here, but what is offered instead are some very useful quotes from participants who claim that "goth is a state of mind...a way of being that embraces what the normal world shuns, a lean toward an obsession with all things dark and grim, a view of life that incorporates the world of night as well as the world of day" (2004, 1). While the "state of mind" mentioned by Kilpatrick is often alluded to by participants,

it is clear that deeply connected to this intrinsic Goth identity is a very clear set of sartorial, musical, and decorative choices that make Goth the highly visible, spectacular subculture that it is.

Where *The Goth Bible* is often humorous and ironic in its description of “Gothdom,” Micah L. Issitt’s *Goths: A Guide to an American Subculture* is a more textbook approach that is nonetheless extremely thorough in the task it sets about to accomplish, namely, to provide a fairly comprehensive overview of Goth subculture in the U.S. As mentioned above, “In its most basic sense,” says Issitt, “goth consists of a group of people who celebrate and indulge in darker elements of style, sound, and other aesthetic avenues” (2011, xi). Further echoing Kilpatrick’s description, but hinting at an even more universal aspect of Goth, Issitt adds that “the primary focus of goth is not simply to be different from the mainstream, but rather to explore and even to celebrate those aspects of the human psyche that most try to deny, but that remain an essential part of the cultural substrate common to all cultures throughout time” (2011, xvi).

Both Kilpatrick and Issitt (as well as just about every other scholar who has set out to define Goth) are conspicuous in their use of the word ‘dark.’ “When used to describe Goth music,” says Joshua Gunn, “*dark* is deliberately ambiguous because it functions *enthymematically*, or in a way that allows each individual fan to assign meanings to *dark* that reflect his or her individual experiences and needs” (2007, 44). Of course, this is equally applicable to fashion and lifestyle and, unfortunately, when it comes to individuals, the matter is complicated by the fact that many dyed-in-the-wool Goths (and obviously Goth bands) will deny the label in an effort to be “anti-generic” and, presumably, unable to be pigeonholed into some neat category. “Because of the necessity of the adjective in describing and discussing music,”

explains Gunn, “and the inevitable associations between past and present musics, there is no ‘outside’ space in which a particular musical work can evade metadiscursive negotiation” (1999, 23). Given this “inevitability of genre” that Gunn describes, and the resistance to such categorization among many Goths, it is probably safe to conclude that whether or not someone is Goth must be considered on the basis of various factors and not just their own personal identification. It is my belief that a thorough ethnographic study is capable of such determination, and thus I have chosen such a methodology (to be described in the following section) in pursuit of my research.

The above authors have provided a fairly good definition of what Goth is, but their definitions are often essentialist and fail to address the inherent differences to be found in different countries. Of course, there must be a certain consistency across cultures for Goth to be recognizable as a subculture, but what does this mean in terms of the context and “cultural substrate” of Japan? To answer this question, a more fully developed academic framework will be necessary, specifically focusing on subcultures.

Defining Subculture

In beginning any discussion of subcultures, one would be remiss if the works of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, UK, particularly Dick Hebdige’s landmark study of postwar British youth culture: *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Along with those of the Chicago School in the U.S., Hebdige and other CCCS scholars pioneered research on subcultures, and emphasized the social, historical, and economic circumstances that surrounded the creation of subcultures like punk. Hebdige made particular use of Roland Barthes’

ideas of semiotics to describe the symbolic use of signs in particular subcultures, such as the safety pin in punk subculture: “The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of life... safety pins... These ‘humble objects’ can be magically appropriated; ‘stolen’ by subordinate groups and made to carry ‘secret’ meanings...” (1979, 117-118).

Hebdige comes to the conclusion, however, that the rebellious or subversive aspects of subcultures are inevitably recuperated into the large society in one of two major forms: “the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form) ... [or] the ‘labelling’ and re-definition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups – the police, the media, the judiciary (i.e. the ideological form)” (94).

However, the Gramscian-semiotic approaches of Hebdige and other (CCCS) scholars authors, while recognized as pioneering, are largely seen as inapplicable to current studies of subculture in the 21st century, thus eventually giving rise to what is known as “post-subcultural studies,” defined by David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl as a way to “retheorize and reconceptualize youth (sub)cultural phenomena on the shifting social terrain of the new millennium, where global mainstreams and local substreams rearticulate and restructure in complex and uneven ways to produce new, hybrid cultural constellations” (2003, 3). According to Weinzierl and Muggleton, there are two major strands of post-subcultural studies, one which attempts to abandon the theoretical frameworks of the CCCS and rework the notion of subculture to better reflect post-modern realities, while the second rejects the concept of subculture altogether as useless to describe the fluctuating and fluid formations that

we observe today, thus participating in a struggle to find new terminology that adequately describes what was once under the realm of subculture. In the end, however, the term subculture still has currency, and is used with newer terms such as clubculture, tribe, and neo-tribe in post-subcultural discourse (2003, 6).

Despite the general disuse of the CCCS theoretical apparatus, it nonetheless forms the foundations for most studies of Goth subculture, which is appropriate due to the fact that Goth grew out of punk, the most celebrated subject of subcultural scrutiny among CCCS scholars. Many scholarly works on Goth take up Hebdige's conclusion about the inevitable recuperation of subcultures and note that, despite Hebdige's formula, the subculture has yet to be entirely subsumed or recuperated into larger society in the way that he described. In *Goth: Undead Subculture* (2007), Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby note that Goth is "unabashedly consumerist and commodity-oriented" (2007, 15) and thus impervious to "recuperation." This "undead" resilience of Goth is, in fact, the subject of an earlier groundbreaking study of Goth from a sociological perspective by Paul Hodkinson, mentioned above. Examining the U.K. Goth scenes of the 1990s, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* draws heavily from existing subcultural theory and his own personal experiences and interviews conducted with individual participants. Previous subcultural scholars of the aforementioned CCCS in the 1970s and 1980s often assumed that subcultures were based on resistance against larger mainstream culture and would inevitably be diluted and subsumed by capitalist consumerism. Hodkinson, on the other hand, shifted the focus away from resistance to instead assert Goth subculture's enduring 'substance.' He defines this subcultural substance as reliant on four factors: consistent distinctiveness, identity, commitment, and autonomy (2002, 28). Hodkinson points out both positive and negative aspects of the subculture he

both observed and participated in, particularly lauding “the extreme creativity of some Goths as consumers, the levels of insider participation in the facilitation and construction of the subculture, the relatively high levels of gender equality, and the partial transgression of boundaries of gender and sexuality” (197).

In fact, such “high levels of gender equality” would later be called into question and problematized by several scholars, most notably Dunja Brill in *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style*. Brill notes that “...contrary to what the subcultural ideology of genderlessness would have us believe, Gothic style and its relative value on the scene are based on a gendered dichotomy of *female beauty* versus *male rebellion against social norms.*” (2008, 46). Gothic styles feature men in makeup and skirts, yet female androgyny is not encouraged, thus forcing women to engage in a form of *hyperfemininity* to gain prestige within the scene and maintain the gender dichotomy vis-à-vis male androgyny. Brill concludes that heteronormative modes have not been transgressed, but rather simply transposed within Goth subculture (2008, 57). Inoue Takako reaches a similar conclusion of the visual kei scene in Japan, particularly in terms of the use of feminine attire and makeup, as well as the emotional and anti-modernist discourse in the bands’ appearance and lyrics. She sees these as intended to flaunt patriarchal conventions, but in the end “...the extended aesthetics created by gender-category violations do not challenge and in fact, reinforce, the existing unequal dichotomy man:woman as they are practiced in the male homo-social community of a visual rock band” (2003, 212).

Regardless of whether or not it is actually effective in resisting heteronormative hegemony, numerous historically and culturally specific factors are involved in the more ready acceptance of such gender-category transgressions as compared to the U.S. and many European countries, such as Japan’s more recent

history of theatrical cross-dressing (Kabuki, etc.) and the general acceptance of male androgyny in mainstream pop culture. The huge popularity of bands like X Japan and L'Arc-en-Ciel (whose members often openly cross-dress and display androgynous looks), as well as the high visibility of LGBT²⁰ individuals in the Japanese media (Haruna Ai, Matsuko Deluxe, Tanoshingo, etc.), while certainly not making Japan a paradise of sexual and gender equality, are at the very least evidence that heteronormative modes are less clearly demarcated than in the predominantly Christian contexts of American and European Goth.

What is important to note about Brill's analysis above, however, is the use of subcultural ideology to explain how those within the subculture describe their behavior without relying on arbitrary notions of rebellion or deviance, instead working within "a modern definition of subculture based on the works of Hodkinson (2002), McRobbie (1994) and Thornton (1995). This definition focuses on subjective identification, individual investment, and the notion of *subcultural capital*" (2008, 15), and also includes the concepts of subcultural ideology and a rhetoric of authenticity. Although Brill focuses specifically on gender dynamics and sexuality within the U.S. Goth scenes, I believe that this is an effective framework for conceptualizing Goth in Japan and the individuals populating it.

Key to the definition of subculture above are the concepts of subcultural ideology and subcultural capital, both used by Brill and originally developed by Sarah Thornton in her study of rave subculture. The former term can refer to the perception of subcultural participants that their actions and choices within a subculture are effectively resistant against a constructed 'other,' namely, mainstream or dominant culture. Taking a cue from Bourdieu, the idea of subcultural capital, then, is

²⁰ LGBT is an acronym referring to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals.

concerned with “‘microstructures of power’ (Thornton) that exist within a subculture” (1995, 24), i.e., the ways in which individuals attempt to enhance their status in terms of subcultural values of style, knowledge, etc. But what does this mean in the social and cultural context of Japan? What is the subcultural ideology of Goth in Japan, and what is its subcultural capital? Also notably lacking in the literature is a focus on how subcultural capital can be used to translate into more mainstream forms of capital for individuals, both economic and cultural.

Before moving on to discuss globalization and cultural identity, it is necessary to examine the ways in which subcultures are observed in Japan. There are many ways of discussing subculture within the Japanese context, but I will focus on two broad categories that are distinctive yet also mutually interlinked. The first category is that of fan culture. While fan culture is more often explored in terms of cultural studies and consumption (Kelly 2004), it is clear that the *otaku* culture and “Cool Japan” phenomenon are being regarded as subcultures in popular culture, as evidenced by works like Patrick W. Galbraith’s *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider’s Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan* (2009). The second category involves fashion and style,²¹ which have historically been labeled using the suffixes *zoku* (族), or tribe, and *kei* (系), here meaning style or system.

First, fan culture in Japan has been widely explored by numerous scholars, notably in William W. Kelly’s edited volume *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*, which takes up diverse fan groups who indulge in obsessions with everything from rap and rock to baseball and sumo. Scholars such as Kelly, however, explicitly define fans as “related to those leisure and entertainment pursuits that are mass in scale and commercialized in form” (2004, 16).

²¹ “Fashion,” “style,” and also “subculture” are all expressed in Japanese academic writing using the *katakana* equivalents of their English pronunciations.

While music and fashion related to Goth can certainly be considered to be of a large scale and highly commercialized, it is difficult to pigeonhole Goth as a fandom, since participants in its subculture often embrace a profusion of musical styles, film preferences, and fashion choices that are only loosely associated under the adjective *dark* (as mentioned in the quote by Gunn above).

Second, the relationship between fashion and subculture is important to examine, as the two are often conflated in common discourse in Japan. As Tomita Ayumi points out in her discussion of Gothic Lolita, historically there has been a distinction between *zoku* and *kei*, with the former applying to various kinds of street fashions up until the 1980s (*Takenoko-zoku*, *Miyuki-zoku*, etc.), and the latter being used when they began to be commodified into the styles of mainstream fashion magazines thereafter. While the use of *zoku*, as in *bōsōzoku* (mentioned later in this section), implies a lifestyle or at least some kind of associated behavior, Tomita claims that the continued use of *kei* to denote the styles of Gothic Lolita and visual kei, and their appearance in mainstream fashion magazines, led to their dilution as mass produced commodities (2011, 11-12). As mentioned previously, this paper does not focus on Gothic Lolita; however, such distinctions are significant because they shed light on how fashion and subculture are interrelated in Japanese media discourse. Yuniya Kawamura, author of *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures* (2012), has probably come closest to my research, as she combines insightful ethnographic research with a sound subcultural theory approach to elucidate the ways in which Japanese youth form their own fashion communities, including Lolita, that play a direct role in determining the direction of Japan's fashion industry and how their creative styles are globalized. However, her research deals almost exclusively with female youth fashion subcultures and, while she discusses Lolita identity in one chapter, the underlying

assumption is that such fashions are temporary and do not extend beyond the clothing itself. For example, she discusses the fluid nature of friendships among Harajuku Lolitas, who often find each other on the Internet based on their mutual fashion tastes, and also rightly points out the emphasis on youth in Lolita subculture. As Kawamura's research is recent and is partially relevant to my own, I will frequently refer to her in my chapter on fashion, but will later explain how Goth goes further than fashion as a holistic subculture embraced by individuals of both genders across a wide range of ages. My research will thus build upon her excellent exposé of fashion subcultures to look more specifically at a diverse group for which identity is reliant not only on fashion, but also music and a wide range of other aesthetic tastes. For now, I would like to discuss further the ways in which subcultural fashions and their associated identities become available through the processes of globalization.

Globalization and Cultural Identity

In considering Goth subculture within the context of Japan, a society outside of where it originated, it is essential to have an understanding of the process of globalization and the formation of cultural identity. Such processes are explained in great detail in the anthropological work of Gordon Mathews, in which he describes his idea of the “global cultural supermarket” whereby individuals in affluent societies, such as Japan, are becoming free to pick and choose their own cultural identities from a global supermarket as consumers. As Mathews describes, in our postmodern search for identity, many of us often pick and choose from the global cultural supermarket everything from our clothing to our religion in order to define ourselves, as our national and family identities gradually lose their hold on us. In this regard, his book, *Global Culture/Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket*,

explores three broad levels of cultural shaping of self. The first and deepest level is the “taken-for-granted level,” which is “for the most part, below the level of consciousness...because we live through taken-for-granted social practices...we can’t easily comprehend how they lead us to live our lives in some ways and not in others” (2000, 12). The middle level is what Mathews calls the “*shikata ga nai* level,” using a Japanese phrase that roughly translates to “it can’t be helped,” which represents “the social and institutional pressures upon the self that it can’t fully resist” (2000, 14). In this stage people are aware of the pressures that are upon them, but must give in to them in order to maintain a certain level of cultural and social acceptability. The third and most conscious level concerns how and why we make certain choices from the cultural supermarket, whereby people believe they have freedom to shape themselves culturally (2000, 15). Cultural identity, then, is “a matter of how people conceive of who, culturally, they are through their choices on the cultural supermarket level on the basis of their shaping on the two deeper levels” (2000, 17). In our rapidly globalizing world, particularly since the advent of the Internet, Goth has come to be a part of the cultural supermarket available to be chosen by individuals in Japan (the third, most shallow level), but it is also appropriated differently than it is in its country of origin (the two deeper levels), and this process will be explored more fully later in this research paper.

Consumption and Creation

Subcultures are often also understood in terms of consumption and, as mentioned earlier, Hodkinson asserts their creative consumerism as a mark of the subcultural substance of Goth. Catherine Spooner offers some analysis of the relationship between Goth and consumerism. Using a comparative literature approach

to Gothic art, literature, and film, as well as Goth subculture, Spooner is one of the most oft-cited authors to describe Goth and the Gothic in their most recent manifestations. In *Contemporary Gothic*, Spooner claims that, “What distinguishes contemporary Gothic . . . is . . . three quite independent factors. Contemporary Gothic possesses a new self-consciousness about its own nature; it has reached new levels of mass production, distribution, and audience awareness, enabled by global consumer culture; and it has crossed disciplinary boundaries to be absorbed into all forms of media” (2006, 23).

While speaking specifically of novels, films, and even advertising that demonstrate these aspects of the Gothic, her explanations can be broadly applied to Goth subculture as well, particularly in terms of consumer culture, and she addresses this subject in her chapter “Teen Demons.” Spooner claims that the subculture “is imbued in economic transactions . . . [but] nevertheless, remarkably distinct from the mainstream market. The marketing of products to Goths in fact often uses a perceived non-mainstream identity as a selling point, emphasizing the difference prized by members of the subculture” (2006, 145). The self-awareness of consuming Goths, however, creates a dialectical relationship of consuming and being consumed.

This dovetails with what Hodkinson has said about Goth subculture, particularly with regard to its subcultural autonomy, whereby “the grouping concerned, while inevitably connected to the society and politico-economic system of which it is a part, retains a *relatively* high level of autonomy” from ‘the system’ (2002, 32). This is important to remember in observations of Japan’s Goth subculture, where a higher degree of subcultural capital can be accrued by those who engage in such subcultural commerce, particularly through the purchase of custom-made items

that were unique to the individual, and DIY fashion and creative makeup are often rewarded with opportunities to model or appear on stage at events.

Naturally, the adoption of certain clothing may be seen as nothing more than a consumer choice, regardless of whether the choice is made internally or externally vis-à-vis a particular subculture. Spooner wrote in *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* specifically about Gothic fashion in terms of literature and film, particularly emphasizing the dichotomy of surface versus depth, particularly with regard to the sartorial choices of Goth that are often regarded as superficial and meaningless by those outside of the subculture. Spooner begs to differ, saying that, “Within Gothic discourse, the clothes are the life: Gothic chic is not a false surface for the Gothic psyche, but an intrinsic part of it” (2004, 197). It is important to remember that the clothing chosen by Goths is actively chosen and they are “cast in the role of Frankenstein, with the significant development that they constitute both creator and created, becoming monstrous through the process of self-fashioning” (2004, 168). More concerned with viewing Goths and the Gothic in terms of their representations in literature and film, Spooner nonetheless devotes some space to the ways in which Goths negotiate their identities in terms of subcultural capital, the Bourdieu-influenced concept developed by Thornton that describes how “subcultures tend to create their own codes of prestige that supplant those of the ‘parent’ culture” (1995, 172). This idea, as mentioned above, is extremely important in understanding subcultures and, I believe, highly relevant to the study of Goth subculture in Japan. The downside of Spooner’s chapter on subculture is that she takes a cultural studies approach of exclusively textual analysis and fails to use any qualitative data from Goth informants (aside from a few brief blurbs culled from other authors). Such data are also based on the European and American Goth scenes, and thus this paper

attempts to fill in this gap in the literature by providing a qualitative ethnographic account of the Japanese localization of Goth subculture.

Permanence and Temporality

The choice of body modification is a way of expressing one's identity as a Goth or, more generally, showing that one is 'different.' By no means specific to Goth subculture, Goths nonetheless often engage in tattooing and other forms of body modification (Kilpatrick 2004), and it is easy for one to imagine that this can result in a self-perpetuating cycle, e.g. I express my feelings of alienation through body modification, which in turn results in a corresponding loss of cultural and/or social capital, thus increasing my sense of alienation. The permanence of such modifications make Goth different from other subcultures which rely more on fashion and association with certain lifestyles that are meant to be 'graduated from' at a certain stage in one's life.

For example, Ikuya Sato, in his book *Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan*, describes the subculture of *bōsōzoku*, or bands of delinquents in their teens and early twenties who engage in reckless but highly organized street races across major thoroughfares in Japanese cities. Such gangs are highly visible due not only to their heavily modified vehicles, but their outlandish and often garish attire as well, making them perfectly fit the definition of a 'spectacular subculture' as described by Hebdige (1979). Sato is dissatisfied with media explanations of *bōsō* activity, which pathologize the youths' behavior as a way of venting frustration with being unable to succeed in conventional society (1991, 15-16). Instead, he insists on the autotelic nature of "play" engaged in by the *bōsōzoku*, who are highly aware that what they do is a form of "mere play" (1991, 36). He also notes the way in which

members were highly aware of the temporary nature of their activities in their respective gangs, being highly aware that they were expected to ‘graduate’ from their current lifestyles (1991, 157). Sato concludes with a rather baleful view of what may happen to those who do not graduate and whose play-like action becomes serious: “detached or liberated from traditional institutions and sacred symbolism...he may, at the end of his search for new freedom, find himself entrapped in the web of a quasi-sacred and quasi-mystical symbolism of a cult, fanatic ideology, or criminal underworld” (1991, 221). Thus it appears that Japanese subcultures like *bōsōzoku* are seen as temporary youth cultures that will inevitably be cast aside in favor of a ‘normal’ life of marriage, family, and full-time employment. Isaac Gagné (2013) also mentions the physical and social pressures to graduate for women who are part of the Lolita fashion subculture (which can overlap with Goth in the form of Gothic Lolita). However, in more recent years there seems to be a trend toward refusal to graduate from subcultural styles and a continuation well into adulthood, often at the expense of mainstream values of settling down. Goth is no exception to this, and body modification complicates such graduation.

Part of the reason why body modification is more significant in Japan than other modes of supposedly transgressive behavior in the U.K. or U.S. (such as androgyny and alternative sexuality) is due to the conservative views toward such modification in Japan. While attitudes toward tattoos and piercings in the U.S. have vacillated, they are now generally accepted as a mode of fashion that is compatible with just about any occupation, so long as they are hidden. In Japan, however, such is not the case. There may be various reasons for this, not least of which is the historical association of tattoos with the yakuza organized crime syndicates. These reasons will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

While not discussing tattoos specifically, Laura Miller offers some other explanations when describing the reluctance of Japanese women to engage in invasive cosmetic surgery in her book *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics*. Equally applicable to body piercing and tattoos, Miller says of breast implants that, “part of the apprehension...could stem from a Confucian belief that the body should not be tampered with...[that] the body is an inheritance from the parents and so should not be maimed or mutilated” (2006, 85-86). She also points out “another persistent cultural belief that may have influenced a sense of repugnance...stems from Shinto concepts of purity and pollution...a long-standing equation of the ‘outside’ with pollution, and the ‘inside’ with purity” (2006, 86). How strongly such notions actually affect the choices of women who seek cosmetic surgery is not addressed by Miller, but this could be recognized as being on the two deeper levels of Gordon Mathews’ cultural shaping of self. In terms of Goth, this represents a particular challenge that is more difficult to negotiate for participants in Japan, since it creates a conflict between the desire to embrace body modification and accrue an identity and subcultural capital, and the social pressures to maintain a certain mode of appearance to maintain mainstream cultural capital.

Subcultures, Socioeconomic Class, and Night Work

When speaking about subcultures like Goth in Japan, or anywhere else, it is impossible to ignore the issue of class. In the pioneering work conducted by CCCS scholars, such as Hebdige discussed above, socioeconomic class was at the heart of subcultural theory, as the activities of mods and punks of Britain were explained by such scholars in terms of their marginalized positions as part of the declining working class. Thornton’s (1995) influential work on club cultures, however, shifted the focus

of subcultural studies away from class-based groups formed in resistance against the dominant culture toward an examination of the subcultural capital-based hierarchies within the subcultures themselves. Looking at Japanese youth subcultures, Satō asserts that most of those involved in *bōsōzoku* gang activities are from middle-class families, and thus he chose to focus on the autotelic nature of such activities as what drew youth to pursue them (1991, 2-3). Nonetheless, it has been pointed out that “the characteristic concerns of the nearly work on subcultures – power relations linked to ‘race’ and class, social segregation and exclusion – are still central to our understanding of the (life)styles and cultural choices and practices of young people today” (Böse 2003, 178). Robert Stuart Yoder (2004, 2011) has written extensively about the issues of youth deviance and marginalized subcultures in Japan, focusing primarily on juvenile delinquency and minority groups in terms of socioeconomic class. Yoder emphasizes the role of class tracking (the movement of students through the educational system according to class) and the “class ecology” that results as key factors behind the reproduction of lower classes and involvement in delinquency, crime, and deviant subcultures among Japanese youth (2004, 46-47).

Goth in Japan has no associations with delinquency and is not limited to youth or lower classes, and instead covers a wide spectrum of ages and socioeconomic classes. Many Goths in Japan balance their middle-class lifestyles with subcultural participation without any problems. As seen in the case of Ai given earlier, however, I found a fairly high percentage of women in the subculture involved in night work (*mizu-shōbai*), and there may be a tendency to blame Goth participation, when in reality class is most likely the true factor behind their situations. In his longitudinal study of hostess clubs in Hokkaido, John Mock explains that, “[b]y discriminating strongly and effectively against women both in education and employment, Japanese

society channels women with minimal education into the entertainment fields. These women have a choice, of course, but it is not an even one: they may choose marriage, which can mean poverty and certainly economic and social dependence and lack of freedom, or they may choose the water trades [*mizu-shōbai*], which offer substantial economic gain and economic and social independence (1996, 189-190). Mock concludes that the hostess trade is a testament not only to the exploitation of women in night work, but also the exploitation of women who choose marriage in an attempt to pursue middle-class mainstream success (1996, 190). In the case of Goth in Japan, which is centered on nighttime club events and various kinds of bars, there is a heavy overlap between night work and subcultural participation, particularly for women. The implications of this overlap have yet to be explored, as socioeconomically marginalized individuals in Japan may turn increasingly toward subcultures in the future.

In sum, this literature that has been reviewed above covers some of the major works on Goth and a few of the scholarly treatises on subcultures in the contexts of the U.S., Europe, and Japan. It suggests that, despite the tendency toward post-subcultural studies that call into question the usefulness of “subculture” as an analytical framework to describe the various substreams and channels of culture that flourish among relatively small groups of individuals, studies of Goth have continued to utilize the term subculture to discuss the ways in which the individuals who participate in that lifestyle define themselves and set themselves apart from more mainstream culture. My research builds mainly on the theoretical concepts of subcultural capital described by Thornton and applied to Goth in the UK by Hodkinson, as well as more generally the idea of the global cultural supermarket posited by Mathews, in order to explore the inner workings of Goth subculture in

Japan. The literature covers the areas of Goth in the U.S. and Europe, in addition to fashion and other subcultures from which participants are expected to graduate, and also raises the subject of body modifications and its implications in Japan. Questions are left unanswered regarding the implications of Goth's localization in Japan, particularly given the fact that Goth involves a long-term identity, style, and, in some cases, permanent body modifications. The question of the role of socioeconomic class and the connection between night work (*mizu-shōbai*) and Goth in Japan is also an open one. This research is intended to help answer such questions.

Methodology

In this paper, I approach Goth subculture in Japan as both a cultural anthropologist and as a critical insider. As such, I employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing in order to gain a qualitative understanding of a subculture that is closely-knit and sometimes secretive. First, I will describe the reasons why I chose Japan and the particular cities of Tokyo and Osaka within it as the loci of my research, and then discuss the specific methods that I used to explore Goth subculture there.

Settings: Tokyo and Osaka, Japan

Japan has been my country of residence for nearly six years, and my knowledge of Japanese language and culture, in addition to Goth subculture, has allowed me to build up a network of contacts within Japan's Goth scene that greatly facilitated my ethnographic research. Within Japan, however, Goth subculture is visible in certain areas more than others. Based on my experiences in the Japanese Goth scene thus far, I have determined that areas in and around Tokyo and Osaka

offer the country's highest number of Goth-related events and establishments (bars, restaurants, fashion boutiques, etc.), which are necessary as the settings for performance in Goth subculture. The first Japanese positive punk (later termed Goth) band, Auto-Mod, began making music in Tokyo 1980, and Japan's maiden Goth-related club event, Club Walpurgis, also started in that city in 1983. As the nation's capital with a population of roughly 13,196,000 people (10.3 percent of Japan's population) (Statistics Bureau of Japan [SBJ] 2011), Tokyo is clearly ideally suited as a site for research, and may be considered representative of Eastern Honshu (Japan's main island). Of course, as a cosmopolitan cultural center the city also attracts pleasure-seekers from surrounding prefectures, and some travel from as far away as Kansai and the Tōhoku region to attend Goth events. Osaka also has a significant population of approximately 8,861,000 people (SBJ 2011), and shares a history of Goth-influenced bands since the 1980s. Like Tokyo, it also attracts Goths from far away locations in Western Japan (and from Tokyo as well), and its central location in Kansai makes it an easy destination for those living in the nearby cities of Kyoto, Nara, and Kobe. Geographically near to Osaka, the large city of Kobe also offers Goth-related establishments and events, and thus my research will likely be carried out in this city as well. Known collectively as Hanshin, these two cities are often considered to have a shared culture (personal communication with informants), and thus I have conducted research in both cities as representing Western Honshu, in addition to Tokyo (representing Eastern Honshu).

Aside from the statistical reasons given above, my personal network of informants and my academic interest in Japan and the localization of Goth subculture in those cities may be the strongest motivations for my research in the cities of Tokyo and Osaka. I spent roughly one year in Kobe (visiting nearby Osaka frequently) and

five years in Yamanashi Prefecture (allowing easy access to Tokyo on weekends and holidays), and the experience and knowledge I have gained formed the basis of my research as an ethnographer, and I believe that my status as a critical insider²² in a subculture that rejects mainstream society allowed me to gain access to information that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. It must be mentioned that, while I was indeed a participant in Goth subculture in Japan²³, I was also in a liminal position in terms of ethnicity and geography. The fact that I am American and clearly of Caucasian descent instantly put me in a marginalized position, regardless of whether or not my Goth identity superseded such considerations in the minds of Japanese people around me. My location in Yamanashi also kept me away from the scene except on weekends, and I would argue that the physical and emotional distance enabled me to make my observations from a slightly more objective standpoint, and this is even more so now that I live in Hong Kong, where I am immersed in academic studies and the acquisition of analytical and observational tools. Such being the case, it is my hope, despite my strong ties to Japan's Goth subculture, that I have been able to represent it in a fair and unbiased way as much as possible.

Methodological Techniques

Interviews

Anthropology has come a long way since the days of cultural evolution of Edward Burnett Tylor and Herbert Spencer, when ideas of proving the discipline as an empirically demonstrable science were the norm. It could reasonably be said that the turn toward symbolic and interpretive anthropology changed everything. In the

²² A “critical insider” is described by Hodkinson as researcher who is positioned firmly within a subculture that has distinctive norms and resistance to outsiders, but is still equipped with the tools of critical analysis and observation (2002, 4-5).

²³ This is explained later in this section.

1970s, for example, Victor Turner wrote about symbols, something that was nothing new to anthropological inquiry. Where he differed from his predecessors, however, was in the fact that “what mattered were not the symbols themselves but what they meant to specific people and how they led to action in specific social situations” (Lavenda and Schultz 2000, 196). This in turn led to interpretation of social dramas, a pursuit that would later be elaborated upon by Clifford Geertz. In a famous essay on the Balinese cockfight from his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz makes the claim that the “function [of the Balinese cockfight]...is interpretive...a story they tell themselves about themselves” (1973, 448). In what is perhaps his most frequently quoted phrase, Geertz states his position by saying “that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5). He could not be any more explicit about his preference for an interpretive approach to anthropology, which he terms “thick description,” over experimental or empirical science. Geertz’s heavy emphasis on reading cultures as “texts” thus paved the way for entry into an era that focused on the various methods associated with ethnography.

In order to gain the necessary data to form the texts of cultures, or in this case, subcultures, ethnographic methods are indispensable. Anne Allison, a prominent anthropological scholar of Japan, has explained that ethnography is a way of “getting to know a subject inside and outside of its skin...[in which] it is critical to approach a subject not only through a body of literature and analytic guidelines but also by gaining an understanding into its lived and discursive nature – how it is actually experienced, conceptualized, and talked about in the field” (2006, 32). To truly learn how Goth subculture is experienced in a Japanese context, it was thus necessary for

me to arrange in-depth interviews with participants with whom I had established a firm relationship of trust. These then form the majority of the cultural texts that I use to analyze Goth subculture in this paper.

From December 2012 to January 2013 I spent three weeks in Japan, and later spent a total of two months there from mid-May to mid-July 2013. I divided my time roughly evenly between the Tokyo and Osaka areas, and during my field research I obtained in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty key and specialized informants in Goth subculture, each lasting anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours. I transcribed and translated the interviews, which were conducted in the Japanese language and recorded on a small digital device, always visible and used with permission. Since Goth is an extremely visual subculture, during the interviews I took note of the informants' attire, body language, and other important features, and also obtained photos and other media from the informants when possible. Interviews were always conducted in a public setting, usually in a café or restaurant, but sometimes at a club event in a suitably quiet area. Interviewees were not remunerated, but after concluding I always offered to pay for the drinks or food consumed during the course of the interview. Of the twenty interviews, nineteen were held in Japan, while one was conducted in Hong Kong. One of the twenty interviews was conducted online, while the others were all held face to face in a semi-structured manner. Of course, I took notes during numerous unstructured interviews, and also held some follow-up interviews with informants.

Due to the relatively small size of the subculture and the fact that I had already built up friendly relationships with many of the dark stars in the firmament of Japan's Goth scene, it was a relatively simple task to write up a list of informants that I suspected would be able to provide valuable insight into Goth subculture. Those that I

did not know well were introduced to me by existing acquaintances, and through their recommendations I was able to penetrate areas of the scene that an outsider might not have had access to. As a result, my interviewees included prominent musicians, DJs, fashion designers, body modification artists, and event organizers, as well as fans that merely participated in events. While there are numerous non-Japanese heavily involved in the scene, many of them are often there temporarily and did not grow up in a Japanese cultural and social context, and therefore I did not conduct formal interviews with them. Their familiarity with Goth subcultures in the U.S. and Europe, however, provided valuable insight from a comparative perspective during my numerous informal conversations with them.

Strictly speaking, a sample of twenty individuals may not always accurately reflect a subculture that includes hundreds of people; however, as Weller and Romney (1988, 77; quoted in Bernard 2011, 154-5) have demonstrated, a well-defined cultural (or subcultural) domain can be understood based on information gleaned from only ten to thirteen knowledgeable informants. Since more than half of my informants were qualified to speak as (sub)culturally specialized informants due to their high and long-term involvement in Goth subculture, I believe it is safe to conclude that my pool of informants has provided a reasonably accurate representation of Goth subculture in the greater Tokyo and Osaka areas. Unfortunately, due to limitations in terms of space and scope, in this study I have only quoted a certain number of my informants in any great length, choosing to give fuller portraits of a few rather than brief sketches of all of them. The words of my unmentioned informants, however, have also contributed immensely to my overall grasp of the subculture, and provided me with many of the details about Goth in Japan found throughout this paper. Interviews, however, tell only half of the story, and to gain a fuller understanding of

Japan's Goth subculture, it was necessary for me to plunge headfirst into its sepulchral depths and experience it firsthand.

Participant Observation

The method of participant observation is another tried and true tool of the trade for anthropological ethnographers, and I took full advantage of my time in Japan to spend as much time as possible in the club events, shops, restaurants, and other areas haunted by those who embrace Goth subculture. As a member of Goth subculture myself (detailed in the following section), I was what H. Russell Bernard would call an “observing participant,” namely, one of those “insiders who observe and record some aspects of life around them” (2011, 260).

Regarding the locations, Ian Condry’s work on Japan’s hip-hop music culture, provides an important precedent, particularly with regard to his ideas about *genba* (Japanese for “site” or “location”), which “offer a way to distinguish between different paths of cultural globalization by focusing on performativity” (2006, 94). According to Condry, clubs and freestyle sessions in Japan’s hip-hop scene are the performative spaces where the local and global intersect, and they can thus reveal significant interactions among cultural flows. He refers to this process as “*genba* globalization because it highlights the ways the global, here meaning everything one can draw on (not just ‘foreign’ ideas), is refracted through performative locations and thereby put back into the world” (2006, 94).

Since Goth is a heavily music-based subculture, and performances involving music (whether live or played by a DJ) are an integral part of any Goth gathering, I chose to focus on what are called ‘club events,’ which are events revolving around live and/or DJ music and various performances and take place in live houses, bars, or

other spaces. While not always specifically focusing on Goth subculture, such events usually take place on at least a monthly basis, and draw in anywhere from several tens to more than one hundred participants in a given night. I also spent a great deal of time in shops and restaurants that feature dark, unusual, or occult products and/or décor, as well as tattoo and body piercing shops. I was fortunate enough to also have the opportunity to volunteer as a bartender in Gothic fetish bar in Kobe, where I spent 14 nights observing and taking field notes.

Online and Written Sources

For Goths of all ages, the advent of the Internet has allowed access to unprecedented amounts of information on Goth subculture. Any genre of music imaginable is at one's fingertips, and social networking sites provide an opportunity for those with morbid inclinations to meet each other and form online communities, as well as advertise subcultural events and products. While not focusing on such sites and communities, I have taken into consideration some of them as a supplement to comments made by my informants in order to gain a better idea of what other subcultural individuals think about certain issues, and also discover opinions that may be expressed more easily in a relatively more anonymous forum. SNSs like Facebook and Mixi were primarily used for this additional research. I also collected event/shop flyers and Goth-related magazines and books (particularly those written by or featuring my informants), as well as general newspaper and magazine articles on relevant topics, in order to gain additional insights into Japan's Goth subculture. All of these texts have been taken into consideration in my analysis.

Reflexivity of the Researcher

Like most other ‘spectacular subcultures,’ Goth has a very clear distinction between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ While Goths in Japan are very friendly and assimilate fairly well into their cosmopolitan settings, it is very clear to them which people ‘belong’ in a Goth club and which do not, often on the basis of sartorial choices. Especially in the areas of fetish and extreme body modification, there is a natural caution toward those who are not a part of the subculture, as there may be a potential risk of embarrassment or, at worst, social and legal repercussions²⁴. Fortunately, my status as a critical insider has been gained through nearly 6 years in Japan, nearly all of which was spent involved in Goth subculture in some form or another. My status as a non-Japanese and my residence outside of the major cities prevented me from becoming a ‘true’ insider, but my proficiency in Japanese language (JLPT-N1²⁵) and culture, along with my personal interest in Goth, have secured acceptance and trust among the major players in the scene. In the words of Brill, I have been a “...transnational part-time Goth, somewhere in the middle between native and foreign, between indulgent participant and relentless researcher...” (2008, 23).

If the ethnographer is the lens through which a subject is to be viewed, then it must, perforce, be explained what kind of lens is being used, and what possible distortions may result. While I have done my utmost as a researcher to maintain a balanced view of Goth subculture, I believe that it is imperative that I go into some detail in describing myself and my relationship with that subculture, both in my home country and Japan.

²⁴ These potential repercussions are explained in detail in Chapter 4.

²⁵ N1 is the highest level of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test, organized by the Japan Foundation and Japan Educational Exchanges and Services.

Let us start at the very beginning (a very good place to start). I was born to a Protestant family in the small city of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in the 1980s, and led a rather uneventful life amidst the verdant forests and gently rolling hills surrounding that small city. I had already received my initiation into the world of Japanese popular culture through a perhaps unlikely source, having been weaned on *Godzilla* films from the tender age of three; however, I was not to become actively interested in Japanese pop culture in any serious way until my early teenage years, when I encountered the game and anime *Pokémon*, which set me off on a journey of discovery that introduced me to manga, video games, and Japanese food and music, and eventually led me to pursue more traditional forms of Japanese culture and the Japanese language.

At the same time, despite my extremely sheltered upbringing, I had always harbored a love for the dark and macabre – Halloween was always my favorite time of year, and I recall being fascinated by vampires from a very young age. It was not long before my Gothic inclinations and Japanophilia were married together in my discovery of Japanese visual kei music, particularly a band known as Malice Mizer. With their decadent yet elegant Baroque and Victorian-era aesthetics and theatrical borrowings from Gothic literature, the band embodied my vision of what “Goth” truly was.

After entering The University of Pittsburgh as a major in Japanese language and culture, my world expanded considerably. Although I visited my first Goth club during that period, my interest was still bound up in the Japanese visual kei aesthetic that, at the time, seemed to be a more elegant and ‘authentic’ representation of the subculture that contrasted with the more music of mainstream U.S. acts like Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails. I was finally able to visit Japan as an exchange student

at Konan University during my third year, and it was there that I finally was able to see my favorite artists in person and purchase the Gothic attire that I had so long aspired to own.

It was not until after my graduation, when I returned to Japan as a teacher of English, that I finally discovered Goth subculture in Japan. Upon a random invitation from a friend more well-versed in underground visual rock than myself, I found myself at my first Goth club event in April 2008, where I was absolutely stunned by what I saw as a rich and vibrant subculture thriving beneath the surface of what most people commonly associated with underground culture (i.e., mainstream visual kei and Gothic Lolita fashion). Despite living more than three and a half hours away (by car and bus) from Tokyo, I managed to visit nearly every weekend for a period of nearly five years, and during that time I managed to build up some of my most lasting friendships and connections in Japan.

Although I never dreamed of approaching Goth subculture in Japan as an academic, as the end of my English teaching contract loomed ever closer, and with the encouragement of friends and family, I decided to pursue my higher education. The question was: what would I study? A good friend of mine convinced me that my time in Japan had already provided me with the foundations for an ethnographic study of a subculture: Goth. I had participated in countless events, served as an MC and DJ, and performed in fetish and body modification performances. All of these experiences were valuable sources of information, and the networks I had established would provide a ready pool of informants. And so, I made the application and found my way into my postgraduate studies under the discipline of cultural anthropology.

While I had had none of the theoretical frameworks or methodological tools of an anthropologist, my time spent in Japan's Goth subculture as a participant allowed

me to easily find the right people to interview, and my knowledge of the subculture (my subcultural capital) enabled me to connect with my informants on a deeper level than someone from outside of the subculture. My Japanese skills, based as they are on four years of university training and nearly six years spent in Japan, were more than sufficient for the tasks of conducting in-depth interviews and participant observation, particularly in my time at the Gothic fetish bar, where I conversationally entertained customers in a private setting. It must also be noted that I have also engaged in various forms of permanent and non-permanent body modification ‘rituals,’ and this has contributed to the implicit level of trust between myself and the others involved in such activities within Japan’s Goth subculture.

I agree with Clifford Geertz when he says that to abandon all ethnography because complete objectivity is impossible “is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer” (1973, 30 [quoting Robert Solow]). Nonetheless, I realize that my strong association with Goth subculture may, despite my best intentions and efforts to the contrary, have resulted in an account that may be slightly biased or skewed. As an academic I have done my utmost, and I will leave the rest to the wise and discerning reader to decide.

Structure of the Thesis

This Introduction will be followed by Chapter 1, which explains in even greater detail Goth subculture in Japan, using case studies of my informants and their own personal journeys toward becoming Goth, particularly in terms of how they came to see themselves as having a Goth identity. The case studies come from informants of different age cohorts, and thus reflect historically and culturally specific differences in Goth subculture across the decades. The differences between Goth and

Gothic Lolita (and perceptions of them within the subculture) are further elucidated, and I also argue that those who inhabit Goth subculture often perceive themselves as (or actually are) socially marginalized. I illustrate this type with examples from popular culture, particularly film, anime, and manga in Japan. Chapter 2 then follows with a ground-level investigation of the lives of my informants and how they found and became a part of a community made up of individuals who often reject classification and see themselves as non-joiners. I argue that Goth subculture has its own rhetoric of authenticity that eschews superficial imitation of fashion without a prerequisite amount of subcultural capital, and this capital is based on knowledge of the Western progenitors of Goth subculture, originality and relative independence from consumerism, and a dedication to appearance in terms of fashion, makeup, and body modification.

Chapter 3 focuses on the latter of these forms of subcultural capital and why individuals in Japan's Goth subculture choose to engage in them. Whether permanent or temporary, I argue that for many participants body modification can be both a performative and transformative ritual that becomes an important part of cultural identity and the reflexive creation of personal narrative. Fetish performances are also examined in this light, as are the various manifestations of Western occult, mystical, and Satanic imagery and symbolism that can be found in Goth subculture in Japan (compared to their usual rejection among Goths in the U.S. and Europe). Chapter 4 discusses how the various forms of subcultural capital, particularly permanent body modification, can have serious repercussions in terms of social and cultural capital in Japan. I propose that the willingness to adopt such modifications as a form of subcultural capital is reflective of larger trends in Japanese society, which see a tendency to embrace personal fulfillment through lifetime commitment to a particular

subculture rather than pursue traditional, conservative values and ideas of a successful life. The Conclusion then provides a summary of the paper and offers my final thoughts on Goth subculture in Japan.

Chapter 1 – Goth Save Us: Fulfillment Through Fashion

I met up with my informant Megumi on a hot day in July 2013 in Kobe. Having traveled nearly two hours by train, she still managed to show up with a smile and in full Goth regalia à la Lydia from Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice*, complete with a black lace parasol to protect her from the blazing sun. As we sat down to coffee, I found her to be rather shy and reticent at first, but as the interview progressed she gradually began to reveal the reasons for her turn to Goth. One phrase that she used stuck with me, however. After describing her difficulties in getting along with her classmates participating in the mandatory group activities that are such a large part of high school life in Japan, she told me that “[Goth] saved her.” Her discovery of Goth, particularly Goth fashion, was what she credited with being able to provide her with a sense of self in a highly conformist environment.

My conversation with Megumi will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, the intention of which is to approach the most immediately visible aspect of Goth subculture in Japan, namely, fashion, and what it means in the lives of individuals. Spooner (2006) points out the prominence of outward appearance and especially fashion within Goth subculture in the US and Europe when she says:

Although other aspects of the [Goth] subculture – music, shared interest in particular books and films, activities such as clubbing – are crucial in the formation of Goth identities, visual appearance is perhaps its most definitive feature... Clothing is essential to Goth subculture: Goth can be broadly categorized as what Dick Hebdige labels a ‘spectacular’ subculture, one that seeks to enact symbolic resistance through a controversial and clearly recognizable visual style (94-96).

In Japan's Goth subculture, many individuals also mold their appearances in ways that may appear sinister, shocking, and even grotesque to those outside of the subculture, and this chapter argues that they often negotiate the negative emotions and experiences in their lives by ironically externalizing such aspects in a self-reflexive sartorial and cosmetic mode. For those who find the social circles of family, school, or work claustrophobic and stultifying, the chance to engage in a playful manner what would frequently be viewed as depressing, morbid, or even dangerous, can be a liberating experience. While this is more or less true of Goth subculture as a whole, there are historically and culturally specific factors in Japan that account for the ways in which individuals take up a Goth identity, which can also have repercussions that differ from those in many Western societies (see Chapter 4).

For the Goths that I interviewed in Japan, Goth was more than just a mere fashion. This is true of Goth subculture in Europe and the U.S. as well. While those outside of the subculture may regard the stylistic choices of Goth as superficial and meaningless, particularly given their frequent portrayal in the media, Spooner begs to differ in her book, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*, when she explains that, "Within Gothic discourse, the clothes are the life: Gothic chic is not a false surface for the Gothic psyche, but an intrinsic part of it" (2004, 197). Spooner, in her interpretation of Goth in both Western media and literature on Goth, stresses that the clothing selected by Goths is actively chosen and that they are "cast in the role of Frankenstein, with the significant development that they constitute both creator and created, becoming monstrous through the process of self-fashioning" (2004, 168), and this would certainly seem to be the case in Japan's Gothic subculture as well. In Kawamura's study of Japan's youth fashion subcultures, including Gothic Lolita, she places great

emphasis on the bubble-up theory²⁶ of Japan's fashion economics and the importance of self-fashioning among fashion subcultures, giving them the power to also produce fashion, not only consume it (2012, 118). It is clear that clothing and makeup form a large part of the Goth lifestyle in Japan, as evidenced by the amounts of money spent on Gothic clothing, makeup, and accessories among my club-going informants. The annual amounts spent on such goods quoted by my informants ranged from 40,000 yen to as much as 360,000 yen.²⁷ These amounts only reflect spending on outfits specifically for Gothic events, and do not include everyday clothes, which were almost invariably black or Goth-related as well. As such, fashion is the first aspect of Goth subculture that I approach in this paper and, as we shall see, fashions described by one of my informants (Megumi, described in more detail below) as "dark"²⁸," "unnatural," "negative," "sublime," "eerie," and "startling" are, in fact, frequently sources of empowerment and cathartic expression for those who wear them. This fashion is also a large part of what gives Goth the "consistent distinctiveness" described by Hodkinson, as fashion serves to symbolically connect them to something larger than themselves. Spooner notes that, "Although other aspects of the subculture – music, shared interest in particular books and films, activities such as clubbing – are crucial in the formation of Goth identities, visual appearance is perhaps its most definitive feature" (2009, 96).

As a brief caveat, I wish to avoid any impression that I am adumbrating some kind of reductionist or essentialist claim to a universal homological correlation

²⁶ This theory describes the way that the fashion industry relies on inspiration from lower- to middle-class consumers who design and create their own trends, as opposed to the trickle-down theory of the past, whereby haute couture fashion of the upper socioeconomic classes "trickled down" to the lower classes as they imitated them to achieve upward social mobility. Punk's influence on designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Jean Paul Gaultier is a quintessential example of the bubble-up process.

²⁷ In U.S. dollars, their spending on event clothing ranged from \$390 to \$3,520 per year (conversion rates current as of May 4, 2014).

²⁸ The word "dark" (expressed in Japanese as *dāku*) was used by nearly all of my informants when asked to explain what "Goth" is. One young woman I encountered even chose to appropriate the word as her Goth moniker, romanizing it as "Darque."

between the clothing that Goths in Japan wear and their own personal beliefs, philosophical outlook, or mental health, for that matter. In Western literature there have been numerous studies that attempt to correlate Goth subculture with a tendency toward self-harm, suicide, or violent behavior (Young et al 2006, Rutledge et al 2008, etc.), and such stereotypes were present in the media particularly in the wake of moral panic surrounding the 1999 Columbine High School massacre (mentioned in the Introduction). Such transparent one-to-one correspondences (e.g., wearing black = depression, unhealthy obsession with death) are often the mistaken assumptions of outsiders to the subculture, and years of time in Japan's Goth subculture and ethnographic research have shown me that the reasons for embracing Goth as a lifestyle are myriad; however, I also argue that the fashions worn by my informants have a symbolic significance in their own narratives of self. Hodkinson is quick to point out that “we should not treat the goth style, or any particular elements of it, as symbolic of any particular structural, psychological or political circumstances or goals” (2002, 61). I nonetheless insist that in Japan’s Goth subculture there are oftentimes patterns in the conjunctural reasons for adopting such a fashion and its associated lifestyle. Such patterns include experiences of alienation and isolation (described in my informants’ accounts later in the paper) in Japanese schools and workplaces, and I believe that Goth subcultural style in Japan is less a symptom of psychological problems and more a self-transformative coping mechanism in the search for cultural identity among those who do not always assimilate well into the “normal” society around them. Like Kawamura, as a researcher I intend “to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the surfaces of style, [and] to trace them as symbols that represent the very contradictions they struggle to resolve or conceal” (2012, 2), but I will also take a critical approach to the narratives described by my

informants, while being wary of the fact that subcultural rhetoric may not necessarily reflect the realities of what goes on among the individuals who are a part of them. Using as balanced an approach as possible, I will address the following points in this chapter.

First, I will provide a brief history and description of perhaps the most widely known aspect of Goth in Japan, Gothic & Lolita, in an attempt to provide the reader with some general knowledge of how Goth fashion was fused with a homegrown style. While Gothic Lolita is not the primary focus of this paper, it is important to understand its relationship to Goth as a fashion, particularly since it is often retailed in the same shop space as more traditional Goth wear and worn by many self-professed Goths, is the most visible variant of Goth in the Japanese media, and is often conflated with Goth subculture in Japan. Also, because it is centered on fashion for women, the ubiquity of Gothic Lolita contributes to a more visible gendered image of Goth as female in Japan. Second, this chapter will explore a few such media manifestations of Goth, particularly in film, anime, and manga, in order to provide a general context of how such fashions may be viewed by those in Japan who are unfamiliar with Goth subculture and its history. All of my informants claimed a deep connection between their fashion and personal identities, and it is their thoughts that I will explore in the third section, particularly with regard to how they incorporate their fashion into their own narratives of self. Their accounts can be roughly categorized into the younger and older generations, and I explain how the length of their engagement with Goth subcultural fashion in many ways defines the ways in which they rationalize such fashion in their personal narratives. I also touch on the ways in which gender plays a part in such self-narratives. The fourth section focuses on my analysis of the accounts provided by my informants, which offer a glimpse of the self-

reflexive and ironic aspects of Goth that allowed my informants to engage with their expressions of dark and morbid styles in a healthier, non-self-destructive way.

Goth/Gothic vs. Gothic Lolita and Visual Kei

The relationship between Gothic Lolita and visual kei has been touched upon in the Introduction, but it is necessary to have a more developed understanding of the fashion style and its origins in order to better grasp the thoughts and positions of my informants. In the following subsection, I will provide a brief history of Gothic Lolita fashion, which is easily the most visible and commercialized aspect of Goth in Japan that, nonetheless, occupies an ambivalent position within the subculture.



Figure 3 - Two Gothic Lolita girls (far left and second from right) at an informal Goth gathering. Photo by La Carmina. Used with permission.

History of Gothic Lolita

Gothic Lolita (also referred to as Gothic & Lolita or GothLoli) is a fusion of two distinct fashion styles worn predominantly by women. The nature of the first half (Gothic) has been touched upon in the introduction, and can be defined as predominantly monochrome (black and white) and often adorned with torn fishnets, silver accessories and spikes, teased-out hairstyles, and stark black eye and lip makeup (of course, the variations of the style are nigh limitless). The second (Lolita), also adopted almost exclusively by women, leaves a bit more room for confusion and misinterpretation, based as it is on the titular character of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955). Although the term "lolita," based on that seminal work, bears the original meaning of a sexually precocious young girl, and the Japanese Lolicon (a portmanteau of "lolita complex") refers to the sexual attraction to prepubescent females among older men, "within the context of 'GothLoli,' rather than meaning someone who views young girls as a sexual object, [Lolita] circulates [in Japan] as term referring to someone who loves young girlish clothing, or to the clothing itself" (Mizuno 2006, 157). Displaying a girlish and decidedly Western taste, the brand image now commonly associated with Lolita was first crystallized by the brands Milk in 1970 (by designer Ōkawa Hitomi) and Pink House (by designer Kaneko Isao), and designers from Milk went on to create other brands, such as Yanagikawa Rei's Shirley Temple (established in 1974), Jane Marple (1985) by designer Murano Megumi, and Akinori Isobe's Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (1988). Despite its early origins, Lolita as a fashion term did not actually appear in print media in Japan until 1987, and was not recognized as a distinct fashion style until the 1990s, when a great number of other brands began to appear, such as Metamorphose (1993), Marble (1998), and Victorian Maiden (1998) (Kawamura 2012, 67). Lolita fashion underwent many permutations over the years, eventually branching out into numerous subgenres

such as *ama-rori* (Sweet Lolita), *kurashikaru-kei rorīta* / *ereganto rorīta* (Classical/Elegant Lolita), *hime-rori* (Princess Lolita), *wa-rori* (Japanese Lolita), and, of course, *gosu-rori* (Gothic Lolita) (Kawamura 2012, 39-40).



Figure 4 - A Tokyo Goth/Punk Lolita poses for the camera. Photo by Hineno Tetsuya. Used with permission.

The reason why so many styles exploded in the 1990s and thereafter can be partially explained in terms of economics. The early Lolita styles developed during the booming economic period of the 1980s in Japan. After the country's asset price bubble burst around 1991 and led to a recessionary economy, however, it seemed that the number of subcultural fashion styles began to increase exponentially as young

Japanese were growing up without ever having known the economic prosperity of the previous generation. Kawamura (2012) explains:

I...see a strong, yet ironic, correlation between the growing number of subcultures with distinct appearances and Japan's long-lasting recession. Structural changes in Japan's economy and labor market have contributed to this phenomenon. It has always been my conviction that wealth does not make people creative; rather, we hone our artistic abilities in a state of poverty. Japanese youth of today did not experience Japan's economic success in the 1980s and thus have limited resources, but that may be why their tastes are unique and original. They do the best they can to create new styles with whatever they can find to look fashionable and aesthetically beautiful (136).

Gothic Lolita was certainly a part of this phenomenon, but the turning point that led to the birth of Gothic Lolita fashion was the advent of what are now described as the *shin-(new-)visual* kei bands of the 1990s, more particularly Malice Mizer (1992-2001) and its leader and guitarist, Mana. From their earliest performances, Mana had always appeared in attire that would typically be gendered as female: skirts, dresses, corsets, and long, sometimes curly hair with elaborate headpieces, accompanied by thick, doll-like makeup. The general aura of mysterious androgyny was maintained by his early decision to completely avoid speaking in public appearances (which would reveal his masculine voice). In fact, his look was part of a general trend among the exclusively male visual bands²⁹ in which, while all of the bands appear in androgynous attire, at least one member is distinctly cast as a cross-dresser. Notable examples include Yoshiki (drums and piano) of visual kei forerunner X Japan, Shinya

²⁹ Only recently have there been exceptions to this, such as the all-female visual bands Aldious, Cyntia, Destrose, and exist+trace.

(drums) of Dir En Grey, and Hizaki (guitar) of Versailles. Izam (vocals) of Shazna is another notable example, and is also credited with initiating the Gothic Lolita boom (Mizuno 2006, 159) It was Malice Mizer's Mana, in particular, who had arguably the largest influence on the burgeoning fashion subculture of Gothic Lolita. His persona was not usually of a full-grown woman, but a young girl (having even named his guitar "jeune fille," French for "young girl"), and the styles he adopted often incorporated what was commonly regarded as Lolita fashion in his various costumes. While initially having something of a French pop sensibility, the darker edge of Malice Mizer was always visible, with songs about vampires and sadomasochism often coming to the fore. As a result, Mana's attire often reflected this gothic aesthetic, and although there is still debate over who first coined the term "Gothic Lolita," Mana is credited with initially personifying the style. Regardless of who invented the neologism, Mana was certainly one of the first to cash in on it when he opened his own brand of clothing called Moi-même-Moitié, which carried two main lines: Elegant Gothic Lolita (EGL) for women and Elegant Gothic Aristocrat (EGA) for men. Characterized by dramatic silhouettes and designs featuring crosses and roses, the brand had stand-alone shops up until 2011, when it was absorbed by the boutique KERA SHOP, which operates its businesses in numerous department stores among Japan's major cities (Mana-Sama.net 2014).

After Moi-même-Moitié first appeared, it was not long before the style was emulated by other brands (some of which already had separate lines of gothic- and lolita-inspired garments). A quarterly "mook" (a Japanese portmanteau of "magazine book") called *Gothic & Lolita Bible* began publication in 2001 and continues to be published with a circulation of over 100,000 (Talmadge 2008), chronicling the latest trends in the Gothic Lolita world and interviews with influential designers and

musicians, including Mana. An English version even circulated for five issues from 2008 to 2009, at a time when the Gothic Lolita fashion craze had died down in Japan but was still going strong in the US and Europe, especially among the anime convention circuits in those regions. In an interview with the English-language *Gothic & Lolita Bible*, Mana said, “I draw my [fashion] influence from vampire movies, because I’m attracted to the aesthetics of Gothic romance, the beauty of the dark of the night” (G&LB 2008). He also confirmed that he was indeed among the first to advocate “the then-new style called Gothic Lolita, which combines cute with dark and mysterious, and wanted to make it a genre of fashion that permeated all the corners of the world” (G&LB 2008). Its international appeal is based in part on the striking juxtaposition that Gothic Lolita represents. While it is certainly true that the innocent and elegant appearance of Gothic Lolita has its precedent in Gothic literature, it may be too much to expect that those who wear such fashions are completely aware of the traditional morally pure Gothic heroines of authors such as Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823). However, it is also clear that Mana is consciously channeling the imagery of vampire movies into his designs and combining it with something “cute” or *kawaii*. Funereal hues and associations with death in the form of coffins and skulls ‘corrupt’ the Lolita fashion that, at least in principle, is expected to convey the cuteness and innocence of girlhood, or to exude an aura of ladylike propriety. This juxtaposition is important in terms of Gothic Lolita’s portrayal in popular cultural media, as will be described in more detail below.

Of course, given the fact that Gothic Lolita as a fashion has its origins in visual kei music, it is understandable that interest in that genre and the clothing style often overlap and thus, as stated by one of my informants, “It’s kind of become an

icon of girls who like visual kei music³⁰.” This only tells part of the story, however, as I encountered several informants who adopted Gothic Lolita variations and had no interest in visual kei music, and based their identities on Western Goth and its associated subculture. While sometimes confused as anime cosplay or maid fashion, Lolita, its variant Gothic Lolita, and Goth fashions in Japan are more often than not representative of a strong personal identification with a particular lifestyle that goes beyond mere clothing and makeup. “Lolita is self-expression and self-satisfaction,” says Kawamura, who conducted ethnographic research on fashion subcultures in Tokyo, “... For some it is an authentic identity; for others it is a temporary identity with a mask... Lolita takes them to a different world psychologically and emotionally, and that in turn affects and changes their personae for that moment” (2012, 7). It is worth noting here that, as will be described in this and later chapters, Goth in Japan is notable due to its permanence and pervasiveness as an identity that goes beyond the immediate act of dressing.

As mentioned above, Gothic Lolita has also gone global, and Kawamura points out that “The process of fashion diffusion used to involve a highly centralized system, initially started in Paris. ... [However,] trends are no longer set by professional designers. Fashion originates in many types of social groups and communities, such as youth subcultures, and as a result, fashion emanates from many sources and diffuses in various directions” (2012, 128). In my own experience, I have found Gothic Lolita has circulated in interesting ways, as the Victorian sensibilities, monochromatic ensembles, and dark imagery traveled from Europe and the U.S. to fuse with Lolita fashion in Japan and eventually flow back to its origins in a new form

³⁰ The views of my informants on Gothic Lolita fashion will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

adopted by individuals there who approach it through the gateways of manga, anime, and Japanese rock music.

The topic of such global flows of subcultural meaning is explained later in this chapter. For now, Japanese manga and anime, as well as film, can offer further insight into the ways in which Gothic Lolita (and Goth, with which it is often conflated) are viewed and stereotyped in Japan. A brief review of notable works featuring characters that may be described as Goth will also provide an important context and point of comparison against which we can measure the way my informants construct their own identities through fashion, and how such fashions provide important meaning in their own self-narratives.

Goth in Japanese Popular Culture

Although Goth and Gothic Lolita are only marginal subcultures embraced by a relatively small number of people in Japan³¹, their influence on various media, such as anime, manga, and film, is readily apparent, and Goth fashions can be found around the country in major department stores like Marui One. Chris Barker (2012) points out that the presence of a subcultural style in popular media can both be both diminishing and enhancing to a subculture. It can be diminishing in that the authenticity on which a subculture founds its rhetoric can be undermined when subcultural symbols become increasingly present in what individuals perceive as mainstream culture. It can also be enhancing in that it allows a broader range of

³¹ The presence of Goth and Gothic Lolita brands in major department stores is a testament to its relatively high profile in the fashion world of Japan. Numbers of those who identify with Goth subculture, on the other hand, are harder to get a firm grasp of. As stated in the introduction, I estimate somewhere around 200 “hardcore” event-goers in Tokyo alone, in addition to numerous individuals who participate in the subculture to varying degrees (those who do not attend events often, or who work at shops, bars, or restaurants directly affiliated with Goth subculture).

individuals to come into contact with the subculture, identify with it, and eventually participate in it and further its growth and expansion (449).

As mentioned above, there are many young people in Europe and the U.S. who have adopted the Gothic Lolita fashion style as a result of their exposure to anime, manga, and music from Japan, and I would argue that the same process is applicable in the country in which such media forms originate. Many of my informants professed an interest in anime and manga and, as one might expect, the subject matter often came up in interviews. In this section I will discuss some of the appearances of Goth and Gothic Lolita in such media and analyze the images presented by them. In my search for such examples, I found an overwhelming preponderance of female characters portrayed in such garments, whereas males engaging in contemporary Goth fashion in the works were usually musicians or other artists. This is reflective of the general tendency to view subcultural fashion in Japan as the domain of females (for example, Kawamura's 2012 *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures* focuses exclusively on young women). However, as will be revealed through my informants, Goth fashion is relevant to males in Japan as well.

Although popular culture manifestations are myriad, I have chosen a few that present characters wearing Goth and/or Gothic Lolita fashion and argue that they are presented as devices to create a fantasized Western atmosphere, as creative/individualistic characters, or as socially maladjusted/dangerous individuals that must eventually be eliminated or recuperated, with the latter category being the most common. I argue that Goth attire is often used as a visual cue to portray a character as unable to fully engage in normative adult life and mainstream society or, at worst, as mentally disturbed or violent. In the case of Gothic Lolita, I assert that the idea of the innocence of girlish clothing being 'corrupted' with the darker aspects of

Goth is a homological tool in such stories to represent a character's transformation into a violent or mentally unhealthy individual.

Perhaps the most frequently visible instances of Gothic Lolita fashion permeating Japan's popular culture can be found in manga, anime, or film that attempt to realize a fantasy version of a romanticized West. In the supernatural horror anime *Le Portrait de Petit Cossette* (Shinbō Akiyuki, 2004), the titular character is presumably a young girl who lived in 18th century France, and her attire reflects a stylized idea of Occidental fashion that has strong ties to Lolita fashion. *GOSICK* (pronounced "Gothic") is a light novel series (Sakuraba Kazuki, 2003-2011) that spawned a manga and anime, and the series uses Gothic Lolita styling to add flavor to its setting in a fictional European country circa 1924. The multi-media franchise *Black Butler* (original manga by Toboso Yana, 2006-ongoing) follows a similar pattern, offering a Gothicized take on Victorian England as the setting for a Faustian tale of vengeance at the price of one's soul. In all of these cases, Gothic fashion serves little more function than as a prop to achieve a Westernized Gothic flavor, without regard to historical verisimilitude. However, it is important to realize that the popularity of such titles, particularly *Black Butler*, has worked to cement the popular conflation of Gothic and Gothic Lolita with cosplay.

In anime, manga, and films set in contemporary Japan, however, characters shown wearing Gothic-inspired fashions are sometimes seen as creative or individualistic. Yazawa Ai's hip manga *Paradise Kiss* (1999-2003) features a variety of fashion subcultures worn by her fashionable characters, including punk and Lolita. The manga was popular enough to warrant an animated television series (directed by Kobayashi Osamu, 2005) and a live-action film (directed by Shinjō Takehiko, 2011) starring Kitagawa Keiko and Mukai Osamu. The series is notable in that it depicts the

struggle of a high-school girl who has become disillusioned with the drudgery of study for university entrance exams and is allured by the lifestyles of her creative fashion school friends, including Lolita girl Miwako. Yazawa Ai has admitted to being heavily influenced by the punk movement and the various fashions it inspired, and thus it is little wonder that her portrayal of characters wearing them is positive. Another example of a positive portrayal of Goth fashion and also subculture is *KISSxxxx* (pronounced *kisu*, released from 1989 to 1991) by Kusumoto Maki, and it was mentioned to me by several of my older informants (age 30 and up). The manga focuses on a romance between a high school girl and the vocalist of a band, and features Lolita and Gothic elements of fashion that were not well known at the time. My informant Yūko (introduced below) told me that the manga is a fairly accurate reflection of Japan's Goth club and music scene in the 1980s.

Although the portrayals above are relatively realistic and positive, more often than not, Goth or Gothic Lolita fashion is observed in characters that are engaging in a form of escapism, or are perhaps mentally or emotionally unstable and potentially dangerous. In Nakashima Tetsuya's 2004 film *Kamikaze Girls*³² (adapted from a light novel by Lolita advocate and novelist Takemoto Novala), popular actress Fukada Kyōko plays the role of Momoko, a young woman who lacks friends and chooses to escape into a world of Rococo-era elegance by means of her favorite Lolita fashion brand, Baby, The Stars Shine Bright (a real clothing line founded in 1988 by Isobe Akinori and his wife, Fumiyo). In the end, she discovers friendship with a female gang member and a happy ending is reached. The general outlook of the film toward Lolita and subcultural fashion is a positive one, but it nonetheless leaves the impression that there is a very strong association with escapism, something that is

³² The Japanese title is *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, or “Shimotsuma Story,” which refers to primary location of the film in Shimotsuma City, Ibaraki Prefecture.

reiterated by some of the designers themselves. Arguably one of the most famous designers of Goth clothing in Japan, Hirooka Naoto (of eponymous brand h. NAOTO), claimed in an interview with The Japan Times that Lolita is a rejection of conformism to traditional gender roles and the commonly accepted Western fashion norms, saying, “One of the salient points about Lolita is that it is really a fashion that is not intended to attract men... The women are creating their own world into which they can get away from the pressures of the larger society” (Talmadge 2008).

Aside from mere escapism, subcultural fashion, particularly Goth, can be observed in characters that are unstable, one example being the character of Amane Misa, who sports Goth and punk fashion and plays a prominent role in the manga *Death Note* (Ōba Tsugumi and Obata Takeshi, 2003-2006) and its anime (directed by Araki Tetsurō, 2006-2007) and live-action film (directed by Kaneko Shūsuke, 2006) incarnations. The character of Misa is presented as shallow and obsessive, and her love for the lead character, Light, allows her to be manipulated to kill and also shorten her own lifespan to further his goals. Her fashion may thus be seen as visually hinting at a potential for self-destructive behavior. A rather extreme example of a character wearing Gothic Lolita being seen as dangerous can be found in the 2007 live-action horror film *X-Cross*, directed by Fukasaku Kenta. Wearing Gothic Lolita apparel (in a collaboration with designer h. N AOTO), Ozawa Maju portrays a psychotic killer obsessed with vengeance and wielding oversized scissors as her chief weapons. A similar theme can be found in Ohara Gō’s live-action *Gothic & Lolita Psycho* (2010), in which the lead character (played by actress and gravure idol Akiyama Rina) adopts Gothic Lolita attire and goes on an ultraviolent killing spree to avenge her mother’s murder at the hands of a group of mysterious assassins. In the latter two cases, it can be argued that the Gothic Lolita fashion adopted by the characters is symbolic of their

emotional and/or mental instability, ultimately manifesting itself in violent or antisocial behavior. As a Gothic or dark ‘corruption’ of the pure and innocent Lolita fashion, it is perhaps easy to see why such a style is visually symbolic of the psychological turn from ingenuous girlhood to destructive behavior.

Another case of a Goth appearing in entertainment media in Japan that is particularly relevant to this chapter can be found in the character of Nakahara Sunako in Hayakawa Tomoko’s *Yamato Nadeshiko Shichihenge* (2000-ongoing, 34 volumes, serialized in *Bessatsu Friend*), which has been localized in English as *The Wallflower*. The manga saw an animated adaptation in the form of a 26-episode TV series (2006-2007, directed by Watanabe Shin’ichi) and eventually a 10-episode live-action television drama (2010). The drama was aired on major Japanese television network TBS and featured Kamenashi Kazuya, a member of the popular boy band KAT-TUN, and thus received a wide viewership. Although each incarnation has its own unique features that differ from the original manga, the character of Sunako remains essentially the same. Called ugly and spurned by the first boy to whom she ever confessed her feelings, the high-school girl suffers a severe emotional and psychological blow to her self-confidence and withdraws herself from the world around her. Rather than pursuing socially acceptable forms of beauty, she instead turns to all things dark and frightening, locking herself in the darkness of her room and indulging in splatter films with her only friends, a trio of inanimate anatomical models that she regularly converses with. In the television drama she is seen to sleep in a coffin, and only ventures out of her room in a black hooded cloak. While the term Goth is never used in the series, it is safe to assume that most self-professed Goths in Japan would see at least a little bit of themselves reflected in Sunako and her love of the grotesque and macabre, as well as her obsession with ghosts and the supernatural.

Interestingly enough, the manga does include four unattractive Gothic Lolita girls, simply known as the “Goth-Loli Sisters,” who play a comedic role as fan girls who obsess over the male characters and generally cause a nuisance. Their role is expanded in the anime somewhat, but their personalities are not particularly developed beyond the fact that they speak with an exaggerated ladylike speech pattern. It is Sunako, however, who provides the most relevant example of a ‘Goth’ character in the series.

The premise of the manga and its other media incarnations is that four beautiful high-school boys have been invited to live rent-free in the Western-style mansion of Sunako’s aunt, under the single condition that they convert Sunako into an attractive lady. The *yamato nadeshiko* of the title refers to the “personification of an idealized Japanese woman” (according to Kenkyusha’s New Japanese-English Dictionary, 5th Edition, 2003) (a rough Japanese equivalent of the “English Rose”), and the story revolves around the efforts of the young men to have Sunako conform to a ladylike ideal. The irony of Sunako’s character is that she is, in fact, very beautiful and needs only to adopt the beauty habits and manners traditionally identified as ladylike in order to be ‘recuperated.’ In the anime, the action in each episode is frequently interrupted by a small humorous segment called *Lady e no michi* (“Path to Becoming a Lady”), which offers beauty tips and often practical advice on manners and home care. While the resolutions of the animated series and live-action drama have Sunako taken in and loved by the lead male character and leave the viewer with the impression that Sunako will be accepted for ‘being herself’ rather than conforming to her aunt’s ideal, ultimately it seems to be implied that her morbid inclinations and interests are simply an unhealthy byproduct of her emotional trauma

that will disappear once she has seen the light of normalized social relations and socially acceptable notions of beauty and gender roles.

More recently, a short manga called *Complex Age* has appeared on the scene that has become a topic of discussion on social networking services such as Mixi and Facebook, and is also a subject of heated debate among some of my informants. Written by 26-year-old Tokyo artist Sakuma Yui, *Complex Age* tells the tale of a 34-year-old married office woman who has refused to let go of her love of Gothic Lolita clothing, and the work has received the 2013 63rd Chiba Tetsuya Prize, a biannual award given to newcomer manga artists that is sponsored by Kōdansha's comic magazine *Morning*. In the opening frame, the main character Sawako's thoughts are shown to the reader as we see her in full Gothic Lolita regalia: "The first time I wore that clothing...I thought that I could be a princess forever." We find that Sawako is an office lady who has been married to her husband for nearly two years, and while she plays the part of a normal worker during the day, when she arrives at her small flat she makes the transformation into a Gothic Lolita princess in a room decorated from floor to ceiling with dolls, roses, lace, and black fabric. After hearing one of her coworkers discuss the "common sense" of dressing one's age, and meeting a young Gothic Lolita girl who unthinkingly comments on how "it's important to know when to quit," Sawako begins to have second thoughts in spite of her husband's cheerful encouragement. The manga ultimately concludes with Sawako reflecting on her past and burning all of her Gothic Lolita clothing and décor in a massive bonfire. The final frames show Sawako wearing typical fashion and looking at a Gothic Lolita dress in a shop window before walking away with a smile on her face.

The manga itself is played out in such a way that Sawako is meant to be seen as something of a tragic heroine, whose ultimate choice is to be applauded. According

to one news source, *Complex Age* was the subject of over 9,000 tweets on social networking site Twitter by the evening of November 22, 2013, with voices hailing it as “wonderful” and “tear-jerking” (Fujii, 2013). A brief look at my informants’ feeds on Facebook the following day told a very different story, with all comments on the manga being largely negative and critical of the perceived stifling conformist message the nettled Goths saw conveyed in the thirty-six-page short story³³. Regardless of what the author’s original intention was, it would appear that *Complex Age* represents a common viewpoint among mainstream Japanese society, which is that Gothic Lolita and other fashion subcultures are acceptable and enjoyable when one is young, but that ultimately they should be abandoned in favor of responsible adulthood and “looking one’s age.” It is also interesting to point out that Sawako’s husband, Shō, who seems to be something of an otaku, is completely supportive of her habits but ultimately does not really understand the social pressure she faces in her work and private life.

In all of the manga that I have discussed, the characters in Gothic or Gothic Lolita attire shown in a contemporary setting are female, which reinforces my general observation that engagement in fashion subcultures is viewed in Japan’s entertainment media primarily as the woman’s domain. In my own research on Goth subculture in Japan, however, I have found that there are also many men as well as women who embrace Goth fashion and adopt it as a general lifestyle, with some following a path similar to Sawako in *Complex Age* where they have a ‘straight’ job during the day and follow their predilections for Goth fashion in the private sphere, while others maintain a general consistency throughout their daily lives. The latter, however, are often forcibly excluded from certain career types by the “common sense”

³³ The views of my informants on this topic will be explored in greater detail in the following section, and will be touched upon in subsequent chapters as well.

of society (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). The personal accounts of my informants at times mirror a few of the examples discussed above, and it is their various thoughts and insights to which I now turn in the following section.

Thank Goth: Finding an Identity

As discussed above, Gothic (Lolita) and other subcultural fashions can be viewed in popular culture in various ways, but there seems to be a strong tendency toward viewing such fashions as representing an individual's escape into fantasy and avoidance of reality or, at worst, significant social maladjustment. As Kawamura (2012) said of Japanese youth engaged in fashion subcultures like Gothic Lolita, they "rely on a distinctive appearance to proclaim their subcultural identity by which they define themselves. It is the ultimate self-expression for them that asserts their social self" (75). Inasmuch as fashion represents the conscious and externalized creation of self-identity on the part of the wearer, it is worthwhile to investigate the reasoning behind the sartorial choices of the members of a subculture. As a fashion choice, Goth is readily available from the global cultural supermarket (as described by Mathews). In the U.S. and Europe, wearing all black, putting on dark eye makeup, and adopting sinister or occult accessories can be interpreted by conservative and/or Christian elements as Satanic or dangerous. Dressing in an androgynous way may also bring accusations of homosexuality, used in the pejorative, in such countries. Cases of random violence against those dressed differently, particularly Goths, are rampant, while there are also high-profile cases of violence by those who are claimed to be Goth by the media (such as the Columbine shooters), regardless of their actual subcultural affiliations. In Japan, however, the localization of Goth has not received the same response, as it is accepted as just another fashion "tribe" and consumer

identity choice. This is due in part to the fact that Christian-based fundamentalist and legalistic thinking (as one might encounter among conservative elements in the U.S., for instance) is less prevalent in Japan. However, it seems that the dark and sinister aspects of Goth certainly find resonance with individuals, even if their purpose is not shock value as it may be in the U.S. and Europe.

Based on the following accounts from my informants, I argue that the sometimes shocking or at least unusual aspects of their fashion are not, in fact, symptoms of some inability to engage in mainstream society or a desperate cry for attention. Rather, echoing Gunn, I insist that Japanese Goths' fashion, like words such as "dark" that are used to describe such fashion, also functions enthymematically by allowing each individual to assign meaning to and interpret their choices as reflecting their own experiences and feelings. By externalizing their negative feelings, many of my informants claimed to find confidence and self-fulfillment in the ways that they dressed, as I will now explain.

To begin with, I wish to first distinguish between two "generations" of Goths. Although it may in many ways be arbitrary to categorize individuals into only two age cohorts, I believe that it will be useful to look at the difference between Goths in their twenties and mostly unmarried, and those who are in their thirties and older and face comparatively more situational and social pressures to abandon Goth fashion. Examining these two groups will illustrate how the meaning and function of Goth can change with the individual as they continue to adapt to ever-changing social pressures as they grow older. I will start with the younger generations and then move on chronologically to my older informants. It must also be noted at the start that, with one exception, my informants chosen for this section are female. This reflects both the relative preponderance of females within Japan's Goth subculture, as well as the

traditional association of Japanese fashion subcultures with young women as observed by Kawamura (2012). Unlike Kawamura's Lolita informants, however, I found that Goth fashion is adopted by participants well into their forties and fifties (with some concessions, of course), and men were just as likely to participate in Goth fashion as females, albeit sometimes in a less flamboyant manner. In contrast to Kawamura's Lolita's, my informants were not just consumers/creators of fashion, but also often participated actively in the subculture as musicians, DJs, designers, performers, and sometimes combinations of these. Many also continued to engage in these actions even as they grew older, took on adult responsibilities, and became independent.

A perfect example of a young Goth coping with the pressures of adult society, 25-year-old Megumi lives alone in a prefectoral capital city in Western Japan and, like several others that I encountered, she leads something of a double existence. Although she graduated with a junior college degree in the arts, she now works a steady day job as a civil servant at the city hall of her hometown. In the evenings, however, her makeup and clothing change as she meets her friends to practice for her self-labeled Gothic Lolita band (formed in 2012), where she is the leader and guitarist. She also is the founder of a local Goth community that holds small gatherings and events in her home prefecture³⁴. Although a more than two-hour-long train ride separates her from Osaka, she wends her way to that city four to five times per year whenever a large Goth gathering such as Black Veil takes place (outside of events, she also travels occasionally to meet friends and shop), and her daily attire outside of work is always in an elegant Gothic Victorian style, wearing long black dresses with lace trimming and ruffles, black high-heeled or platform boots, and

³⁴ Although there is no official membership list, the group's community on Japanese SNS Mixi stands at 53 as of November 1, 2013.

heavy makeup. She claims Goth very openly as her identity and has a personal narrative of how she came to embrace such an identity within Goth subculture. She explained to me:

About Goth fashion... When I was a [high school] student, I probably liked black because I felt isolated and disassociated – I was so bored that, if you were to make a comparison, I guess you could say that I just endured my life like a living corpse. [Goth] was something like a shift to the beauty of dark things, the unnatural, negative things (sublime, eerie, things that are startling). It might just be that, when I wore normal clothing, I couldn't smile properly and I felt a heightened sense of discomfort, but I got the feeling that if I wore Gothic clothing, I could achieve a form of beauty. Goth fashion helped me to hold on to who I am by allowing me to feel a stylistic beauty at a time when I felt no interest in anything at all. It really saved me.

There was no job I wanted to do, and I didn't feel like there was anyone I wanted to become...I felt like it had the power to give something dramatic even to someone who can't do anything like me. It was agonizing to dress like everyone else around me in spite of my discomfort, and so it was a kind of attempt to just be separate from everyone around me and redefine myself as something other, and by doing so secure a place for myself in the world.

Megumi approached Goth subculture from a fashion standpoint, wrapping herself in dark clothing to both reflect and embrace her feelings of alienation and isolation, and there is a very clear narrative of self and reflexive equation of Goth fashion with her

own disposition. In Megumi's case, being able to embrace Goth fashion was her 'salvation.'

Further underlining the association of adoption of Goth fashion with negative feelings that have no outlet, an informant named Misaki told me about her impressions of Goth fashion in terms of herself and her experiences with others:

This is true of me, too, but I get the feeling that people who tend to prefer [the Goth] genre experienced some kind of oppression in their childhood.

Of course, there are those who like it because of how it looks without that kind of thing ever happening to them. Maybe that's why, but I think the attractive things [about Goth] are that there are some aspects [of the fashion] that throw people off and cause discomfort so others don't come close, and [for Goths,] covering their bodies in lots of black and using black makeup everywhere from their eyes to their lips they express the emotions whirling around inside of them, and through that they taste the illusion of freeing themselves.

I talked about others not coming close, but another appeal [of Goth fashion] is that it tends to attract fellow individuals with similar wounds, and this brings about meetings with people who can understand each other. This doesn't say much for individualism, but...

For Misaki, who has had a history of clinical depression and self-mutilating behavior after a childhood of abuse and abandonment, Goth fashion has been a way for her to express herself and also to bring about meetings with likeminded individuals. She represents a case of someone for whom Goth had a positive, rather than negative

impact. Her lack of family support for further education, combined with a learning disability, contributed to her inability to find steady employment, but through Goth she was able to meet others who related to her and eventually befriended her. Her explanation was reiterated in varying degrees by other informants, who agreed that Goth fashion was often found among those who had no other outlet for the “emotions whirling around inside of them.”

To gain a better idea of Goth and underground fashion among the younger participants, I also interviewed some designers and creators of clothing and accessories that they wear themselves and also sell through various channels. Riria³⁵, the twenty-four-year-old owner of a boutique called NUDE N’ RUDE, selects and designs clothing that meet her own aesthetic sense. She, too, had some disillusionment with Japan, but never managed to make it out of the country, and instead pursued fashion in Tokyo.

I really had a longing for that kind of [punk and Gothic] world, and it was just that time...that I didn't really like Japan, so without any kind of goal I decided I would just study abroad – it was a really silly way of thinking. So just when I was thinking about what I should do, I thought, ‘I should study fashion abroad.’ But when I thought about it with a cool head, I realized that I should probably learn the basics in Japan before going overseas.

Riria had discovered punk and Gothic fashions in high school through music, and it was those styles that she decided to focus on when she entered a three-year program at Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo. After just two years, however, she felt that she had reached a dead-end and dropped out at the age of twenty. The rest of her story

³⁵ This is the informant's self-chosen pseudonym, used here with permission.

plays like something out of a Yazawa Ai manga, as she and her good friend Nana wandered around Kōenji³⁶ drinking alcohol and discussing vague plans of starting their own brand. She said:

I was really sick, mentally [laughs], and I had quit school and I was wondering what to do...so my [friend and current business] partner and I were just walking around drinking in Kōenji every day. I thought, we can't go on like this – we'll end up becoming NEETs!³⁷ If we're going to do this, we have to do it now!

Then 20 years old, Riria and her partner Nana were able to successfully start up their own boutique, NUDE N' RUDE, featuring various clothing culled from around Japan and the world with a punk gothic influence. After their first year, they began introducing their own line of clothing and accessories, which met with considerable success among the underground club scene, particularly Goths, who shared Riria's taste for gothic punk with a hip, updated edge.

A fascinating part of Riria's narrative that I found useful in describing Goth subculture in Japan is in the concept of her brand, “bright despair” (*akarui zetsubō*), and the idea of being [mentally] sick (*yanderu*)³⁸. Items in her fashion line often feature different themes, ranging from the Lolita complex (emphasizing the sexuality of Lolita in contrast to the fashion trend) to serial killers (images of John Wayne Gacy in his clown makeup) and suicidal tendencies (drug and razor motifs). It is in the

³⁶ An area of Tokyo located west of Shinjuku in Suginami Ward, Kōenji has become known for underground live houses and clothing shops. The area is notable as being central to the Mori Girl fashion style.

³⁷ An acronym for “Not in Education, Employment, or Training,” the term NEET originated in the UK but has found extensive use in the Japanese language to describe young people who cannot or will not find conventional employment.

³⁸ This term *yanderu* (病んでる) and other forms such as *kokoro o yanda* (心を病んだ), as well as the term *byōki* (病気) were used by other informants to describe being mentally unwell (see Chapter 3).

concept of “bright despair” that one can see the ways in which fashion is viewed as transformative for Riria. She explicated by saying:

“About the concept of ‘bright despair’... for me personally, when I was younger I was a bit sick [*yanderu*], but at the moment that I overcame those feelings it was like I had reached enlightenment – when that happens it’s as if you can enjoy the fact that you are sick... like, ‘Oh, I’m sick right now!’... So [my concept is that] life is more enjoyable in that way. It’s not like, ‘I want to die,’ but rather it’s enjoying the ‘you’ that wants to die. I want to convey that... I’m offering that kind of lifestyle to people, and doing it through fashion.”

Riria, who jokingly claims that she wishes to start her own religion to change the world based on these concepts, offers a very succinct and, in my opinion, poignant definition of the function that Goth fashion can serve in an individual’s narrative of self in Japan. During my interview with her, Riria brought up the subject of *shinu-shinu sagi* (roughly translated as “‘I’ll die, I’ll die’ fraud”), which she explained to me as the kind of self-harm engaged in by young people, especially high-school girls. Such individuals engage in self-mutilation, such as wrist cutting, not to actually commit suicide, but rather as a cry for help. Of course, there are many reasons for self-mutilating behavior, but Riria mentioned this particular action in reference to her fashion, which she implies offers an alternative “enlightened” lifestyle that externalizes and engages with negativity in a playful way through fashion. Such irony is the subject of the next section, which focuses on the self-reflexive nature of Goth fashion and its function for individuals.

For someone like Riria, who owns her own shop and can dress in whatever fashion she chooses, acceptance in the workplace is not an issue. However, for many

of the older-generation Goths that I interviewed (those in their late thirties to early fifties), balance with work-life pressures was always a factor in their fashion choices. One of my older informants, Yūko, explained to me the reasons why she felt attracted to Goth:

Ever since I was young, I've felt that everything about Japanese society was so restrictive...like I didn't belong. I looked around and saw everyone trying to conform and I just didn't like it. The clothing that I wear makes me feel comfortable. I could never be comfortable while trying so hard to conform and constantly worrying about what those around me are thinking. Japanese people tend to think too much about how others might judge them.

In Yūko's narrative, her turn to Goth fashion is directly related to what she perceives as the stifling conformism of Japanese society. At the age of 42, Yūko lives in Hong Kong on an assignment from the IT company that she works for. Despite being separated from her Goth comrades in Tokyo and without any Goth subculture to rely on in Hong Kong, she still wears black every day and firmly professes her own identity as a Goth. For Yūko, Goth is an outward symbol of her rejection of mainstream values and conformism. However, she also admitted to me that she must dress conservatively for work even in Hong Kong, and be sure to cover her tattoos (one on her upper arm, another on her calf). She told me that her tattoos were accepted in principle in Hong Kong (even though they should be covered), whereas in Japan she suspected that even when not visible they would be a liability when searching for employment if discovered.

When I met Yūko for an interview, I could see that her fashion and hairstyle were fairly conservative, but the monochrome nature of her outfit and various small

accessories featuring skulls, bats, and spider webs were all a dead giveaway as to her darker inclinations. Another informant named Mayumi echoed this turn toward a more subtle Goth style. At the age of 37, she works as a sales clerk and also needs to cover her single tattoo on her upper arm. Her fashion in the past would have been called traditional Gothic Lolita, and traces of that sensibility are still highly visible in her sartorial choices. When asked about her opinions on the *Complex Age* manga described in the previous section, she replied:

That might be the exact opposite of me. I'm 37 now, but [pressure to dress one's age] doesn't really bother me. By doing things like changing my skirt to mid-length [rather than short] – the point is that if you choose nice fabrics and wear them you will become elegant...also, with accessories and other small items you can change the impression you give quite a bit. I'm enjoying all kinds of things and polishing my fashion sense as I go along, so I'm really having a good time [with Goth fashion]!

Again, among the older Goths in my pool of informants I saw a renegotiation of the fashion styles rather than a complete abandonment, as would have been seen more often in subcultures such as *bōsōzoku* (Sato 1991), or even Gothic Lolita (as illustrated in *Complex Age*). For older men who are not involved in a subculture-related job, the balancing act may be even more difficult. Piercings for men are usually frowned upon in workplaces, and they usually do not have the option of covering them with long hair. My informant Seiichirō is fifty-two years old and working at an IT company, and at home he has a wife and two children, one in junior high and the other in senior high school. Seiichirō himself has been involved in a band as a guitarist and vocalist since his own high-school years, beginning with

classic rock like Led Zeppelin and moving into metal as the years went by. It wasn't until he reached around the age of 40 that he discovered the Goth events going on in Osaka, and it was there that he found the style that he uses in his live performances and when attending events.

What interested me most about Seiichirō is that every year, without fail, he would be present at the Black Veil New Year's Eve countdown party in Osaka, which runs from 9 PM until late in the morning of New Year's Day. He would always come by car and therefore avoid drinking any alcohol, and I became increasingly curious about how he balanced his work and family life with his participation in Goth events. In Japan, it is common to spend New Year's Eve with one's family, eating the traditional *toshikoshi soba*³⁹, watching popular television specials, and enjoying New Year's foods on the following morning are staples of the Japanese New Year, especially for someone with a wife and young children. Nonetheless, Seiichirō would always appear, clad in black with his white makeup and dark eyeliner, and would return after the event ended in the late morning hours. What made this even more remarkable to me was that, at the time, he had been on assignment with his company in a far-away prefecture for nearly 10 years, living separately for his family and only returning to visit them a few times a year. Why on this special night (one of the two most celebrated holidays in Japan) would he leave his family to spend the night in a smoke-filled Goth club? He told me:

It just so happens that before Black Veil I had always been attending all-night rock events and drinking with my old high-school classmates.

³⁹ *Toshikoshi soba* refers to buckwheat noodles that are served in hot broth on New Year's Eve. Due to the fact that soba are cut apart much more easily than other types of noodles, eating them is meant to "cut off" any disasters or misfortunes of the previous year and prevent them from continuing into the New Year. Many other explanations exist, such as the length of the noodles representing a long life into the New Year and beyond. Interestingly, Black Veil offers free spaghetti from the bar kitchen on New Year's Eve as a substitute for this common tradition.

Those classmates ended up going to different places, and then I just happened to switch to Black Veil. I return in the morning and do things around the house [with my family], so it's okay. This is Japan, so I eat the *toshikoshi soba* and then the next day I stay with them...so in that way I guess I'm maintaining a balance...it's not that my family doesn't understand, it's just that they have no interest [in things like that], so it's probably better that way.

Seiichirō thus provides an excellent example of one who, even at the age of fifty-two with a wife and children, can manage to balance his Goth interests with his lifestyle. Although he dresses in typical business fashion for his job, whenever I meet him he is always wearing rings, bracelets, or necklaces that in some way show his affiliation with the Osaka Goth scene, particularly items from Territory, which is a music and apparel shop owned by the organizer of Black Veil. When it came to the question of why he adopted such clothing, I had some difficult in obtaining a straight answer during our interview. I found more luck with one of his friends, one of Seiichirō's university classmates who had been in regular contact with him for nearly 30 years. His explanation was simple yet insightful, and spoken in the affectionate manner of someone talking about an old friend's peccadilloes: "Seiichirō is the kind of guy who enjoys feeling sorry for himself." Of course, I could not help but be reminded of Riria's maxim to "enjoy the 'you' that is sick," and it would seem apparent that a certain level of irony and awareness are at work in both generations and among males and females. This irony will be the subject of the following section.

Self-Reflexive Goths: Isn't It Ironic?

Perhaps one of the most defining features of Goth's is a very clear sense of self-aware irony that is often playful. Having gained sufficient subcultural capital (Goth capital; see Chapter 2), a more mature Goth is at full liberty to break the mold and insist that they are Goth regardless of what they wear or how they act, although all of my informants in this category have continued to adopt black clothing and Gothic accessories exclusively, even in their professional lives. One long-time acquaintance (who refused a formal interview) offers a good example of this. Single and 42 years old, Hikaru calls herself a *nanchatte gosu* (roughly translated, an “ersatz Goth”), and always maintains an ironic pose even while wearing nothing but black and decorating her apartment with goods from Tim Burton’s *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and other stereotypical Goth films.

Irony and self-aware posturing is an important aspect of Goth subculture in any context, as Joshua Gunn (2007) aptly describes:

As a deliberate look, gothic style is an active, playful attempt to circumvent the gifts of nature with a manufactured aesthetic that deliberately misleads outsiders. This duplicity derives from goth's ironic spectacularity – an inevitable consequence of the subculture's incessant flirtation with artifice, pageantry, and theatrics. Gothic style is consciously flamboyant and playful; it is a mindful, performative gesture in which liberation is thought to be achieved through a display of ironic indifference. This theatrical, ironic stance, which I call *gothic performativity*, is central to those practices that goths believe are culturally resistant (49).

Gunn is concerned with problematizing the ambivalence between Goths' cultural resistant performativity and their own ironic stance that often nullifies such resistance or makes them complicit with what they supposedly seek to subvert, particularly in terms of androgyny in Goth fashion. According to Gunn, in assuming an ironic performative stance (androgyny) vis-à-vis a perceived norm (heteronormative patriarchy), one is becoming dependent upon the norm and thus complicit with it, as whatever one does is only a reaction in response to it. As mentioned in my Introduction, however, my research has led me to believe that Goth in Japan has much less to do with any conscious (or unconscious) stylistic rebellion against a heteronormative patriarchal society, and instead Goth functions on a much more individual level to allow Goths to externalize and engage in negative aspects of their own experiences and emotions. Informants such as Yūko, who felt constrained by what she perceived as a highly conformist society around her, are certainly dissatisfied with their general situation, but the way that they deal with such issues is highly personal and, I would argue, is meant more to satisfy themselves than to affect any larger change around them.

In speaking of Japanese youth fashion cultures, Kawamura (2012) describes the relationship between fashion and self as follows:

Today's Japanese youth use their everyday lives as a stage and perform an act with appropriate costumes. In that way, their authentic selves do not have to face what is in front of them in real life and who they really are. The way we dress can express our identity – our internal thoughts, beliefs, and values. Thus, by manipulating and controlling our external appearance, we can, to an extent, manage the impressions and images we project to society. Japanese youth drastically transform themselves

by putting on a completely different sense of self. Whether subcultural fashion is the revelation of authentic self or the masking of it to create a new self depends on the person's awareness and consciousness. For some of them, the transformation of their identity by wearing subcultural fashion is their authentic self (102-3).

In essence, she defines two types of individuals: 1) those who believe that their fashion reflects their authentic selves and 2) those who seek to create a new self by hiding or recreating the old self. Both of these types can be witnessed in the first stage of Goth transformation, wherein the individual is enthusiastically embracing a new identity within Goth subculture. As Kawamura said above, the revelation of authentic self or masking to create a new self are dependent largely on the awareness of the individual, but I would argue that such a difference is largely irrelevant for the older Goths that I interviewed (those in their late twenties or older), who would be considered mature Goths.

Mature Goths, then, have reached the point summated in Riria's concept of "bright despair," whereby it is already possible to embrace themselves as *yanderu* and engage in their own negativity in a creative and healthier way. They represent a fusion of the two types mentioned by Kawamura, as they believe very strongly that Goth fashion is a direct manifestation of their authentic selves, but are also sufficiently aware to recognize that their Goth identity is a conscious choice on their own part (at least on the cultural supermarket level as described by Mathews). It is true that several of my informants told me of emotional problems and some even bore the evidence of self-mutilation on their bodies, which would seem to affirm the general impression that Goths are socially maladjusted and potentially dangerous (usually to themselves). Based on my research, however, most of the Goths that I met, particularly those who

were in their late twenties or older, had a very playful sense of humor about their Goth fashion, lifestyle, and identity, and were able to engage in the “bright despair” of having moved on from and beyond some of their more self-destructive tendencies to “enjoy the you that is sick” described by my informant Riria. Rather than masking oneself, Gothic performativity is a reflexive and self-transformative project of creation, recreation, and manipulation, as well as externalization.

Summary

In this chapter, I have offered a brief history of Goth fashion inasmuch as it relates to Gothic & Lolita, which is the most visible aspect of Goth in Japanese pop culture and a fashion adopted or appropriated by numerous individuals in Japan’s Goth subculture. Goth fashion in general in Japan is less likely to carry connotations of devil worship, homosexuality (in a pejorative sense), or dangerous behavior than it is in the U.S. or Europe. In Japan, while it is sometimes seen as a harmless engagement with a fantasized version of the West, the examples from popular culture that I have given indicate that in many ways Gothic Lolita may be viewed as a form of escapism at best, or evidence of psychological instability at worst. The Gothic and/or Lolita fashion embraced by my informants, particularly the females, were likely to be stigmatized to a degree for not “dressing their age.” For those informants, however, Goth fashion provided the foundations of an identity that allowed them to be “saved” when they were unable to fit in with the social circles around them. Ultimately, the portrayals of Goth in popular culture were used to show characters that were running from reality, or even mentally unstable. For the most part, they failed to show the positive transformative aspects of Goth fashion and lifestyle that my informants described to me. For the most part, my informants professed a liking for anime and manga that portrayed Goth fashion, but especially in the case of

Complex Age, they did not agree with the works' assumptions of youth and eventual graduation from their self-chosen identities. In terms of the two main generational categories of Goths, it was observed that younger Goths generally have more freedom to engage in flamboyant subcultural fashions, as they age there is more pressure to abandon their self-chosen styles; however, they still choose to maintain their Goth identity by renegotiating their fashions and balancing their work and family lives with Goth subcultural participation.

It is worth noting here that, while there are certainly social pressures to change their appearance, my informants have nevertheless shown that it is possible to balance "normal" day jobs with subcultural identities. Yūko, in spite of her tattoos and dark fashion, works in a professional setting. Interestingly enough, she confessed to me that her previous work involved being a dating site shill (*sakura*),⁴⁰ someone who is paid by a dating service company to maintain multiple online female profiles and communications with males on dating web sites. Such work is not well known (and, if it is, not well regarded) among many people in Japan, but junior college-educated Yūko managed to move on to a more standard job with little problem, showing that her turn to Goth apparently did not negatively effect her long-term career options. In fact, she ended up escaping Japanese society (which she felt was constricting and conformist) to live in Hong Kong. Seiichirō, while not having any tattoos or body modification, has also managed a professional career and family while still playing in a band and attending Goth events. They prove that balancing a Goth subcultural lifestyle with a professional career and family is, while not easy, certainly by no means impossible. For informants like Misaki, already in an unfortunate situation,

⁴⁰ The direct translation of *sakura* (さくら) in this context is "claque," a term used to describe theatergoers who are paid to applaud or heckle a performance. I use "dating site shill" to better reflect the modern usage of this term to indicate a person who is paid to maintain false accounts and Internet relationships with men on dating sites.

Goth offered a form of fulfillment and positive aspects, including community, which will be described in the next chapter.

I also discussed the important issue of self-reflexivity in terms of Goth, particularly with regard to the concept of “bright despair” that was adopted by my informant Riria as the theme for her sartorial brand. To “enjoy the ‘you’ that is sick” seems to be the self-aware attitude taken by many of those that I observed in Goth subculture who embraced their self-proclaimed status as *hentai*⁴¹. Those in that stage were most likely “mature” Goths that had become well situated in their identity. It was this identity that seemed to offer a great source of stability and comfort for my informants that often expressed dissatisfaction with the social and cultural norms around them. The question of what being “sick” or mentally ill actually means is, of course, heavily relative, and the playful way in which people like Riria speak about it makes it clear that they perceive being sick or different as something generally to be celebrated (in an ironic way). Riria, or any of my informants, may indeed have been considered mentally ill had a qualified psychiatrist examined her – I have no way of knowing. However, considering the fact that Riria has been running a successful business for herself in Tokyo that allows her to express herself creatively, I would venture to say that her predilections toward Goth were no detriment to her finding fulfillment in life, and the same goes for those who were successfully working jobs and maintaining families. In the following chapter I address another way that such individuals found fulfillment in Goth subculture, namely, through a community of like-minded individuals.

⁴¹ Although the word *hentai* (変態), used in noun or adjective form, usually refers to sexual perversion, I found that it was in more general parlance among informants to mean anything abnormal or contrary to mainstream tastes.

Chapter 2 – A Group of Non-Joiners: Goth Community?

At the outset of my Introduction to this paper, I took you to the entrance of a Goth event, surrounded by somewhat sinister-looking men and women in largely monochrome attire with their hair teased out into gravity-defying arrangements and heavy makeup. Let us return there for a moment. As you descend a staircase with walls on both sides plastered over by flyers and posters for local rock bands and events, the heavy bass lines and echoing vocals of a classic gothic rock anthem become louder while the faint smell of cigarette smoke wafts from the entrance. Once inside, and after your eyes have adjusted to the gloom, you notice in more detail the denizens of this subterranean space as they move amongst the manufactured fog and manically flashing spotlights.

You estimate around seventy people to be present, and you notice a man who looks to be in his 30s with tattoos seemingly covering nearly every inch of his body. Where his eyebrows would normally be are only lines of piercings that match the others projecting from his face and ears and, as he reaches for his glass for a toast with a fellow clubber, you notice that his flesh is raised up in peculiar patterns – on closer inspection it becomes clear that these are, in fact, shaped implants that have been inserted under his skin. You notice a young woman in elegant Victorian-style attire and blond curls swaying to the jangling guitars of the current DJ's set, but as the turntables are passed over to another and a pounding industrial bass line blares from the speakers accompanied by electronic effects and harsh, grating vocals, the woman suddenly begins to move her body frenetically to the beat, regardless of her beautifully coifed hair and delicate lace and frills. As she dances you also notice a tattoo adorning her upper chest, which appears to be some kind of occult or magical

symbol. Drinking, dancing, and, above all, enjoying an evening with like-minded individuals – scenes like this are the primary loci of participation and performance within Japan’s Goth subculture.

Many of my informants were either directly involved in the club events⁴² that form a significant part of a Goth’s social life, or at the very least participated in them on a very regular basis. In this chapter, I explore the community of individuals who regularly attend Goth events and base a large proportion of their social lives on them. The people they meet there are usually first bound together in common interests of music, fashion, and body modification, but these “event friends”⁴³ often find that they share many other common interests, leading in some cases to friendships that go beyond the bounds of the club events themselves⁴⁴. Through interviews with my informants and 11 weeks of participant observation (in addition to five years previously spent in the subculture), I found that Goth subcultural spaces, such as events and Goth-oriented shops and bars, offered a valuable alternative to the more mainstream social circles of coworkers and schoolmates. In such subcultural spaces, the social hierarchy could be flattened and conversations could be struck up immediately on the basis of shared interests with less need for traditional formalities dictated by Japanese etiquette norms. In this chapter I argue that Goth subculture offers a meaningful and fulfilling form of community and interaction for those who

⁴² A club event (クラブイベント [*kurabu ibento*]), or simply ‘event,’ is a term used to describe a themed gathering usually centering on musical artists and/or DJs, but also often featuring various stage performances. Goth events usually take place in live houses (concert spaces), but Goth-themed restaurants, bars, and shops are also used as venues depending on the scale, and they most commonly run from around midnight until dawn, although this varies based on the target demographic and day of the week.

⁴³ The term used by my informants is *ibento nakama* (イベント仲間), implying friends and acquaintances who often meet and engage with each other in a club setting, but do not meet outside of such occasions.

⁴⁴ In my informants’ terms, this was called *puraibēto de asobu* (プライベートで遊ぶ), essentially meaning “to hang out in [the] private [sphere].” The distinction between friends exclusively within club events and those relationships that passed beyond them was asserted by my informants without any prompts from my side.

feel less comfortable in mainstream social circles. However, I also point out that the subculture is also rife with factions and a certain hierarchy based on subcultural capital and rhetoric of authenticity. These are common features of any subcultural community in Japan or elsewhere, and distinctions allow for comfort among a defined group. While there are negative aspects of such strictly defined hierarchies, overall the feeling of belonging that is afforded to group members seems to have had positive effects for the informants that I interviewed. Starting with a section on how some of my informants discovered Goth subculture and the perceived benefits that they derive from it, this chapter will then discuss the concepts of subcultural ideology and rhetoric of authenticity and how they perpetuate hierarchy within the subculture. In the last section I will discuss the important idea of subcultural capital, which is a useful heuristic to explain how and why participants engage in certain activities and practices that may be regarded as unusual by those outside of the subculture. The chapter will close with a summary stating how Goth subculture in Japan can provide a meaningful community, sense of fulfillment, and identity for those who are attracted to the “darker” aspects of life, where they can meet people with whom they feel comfortable sharing their interests.



Figure 5 - Two Goths at a club event in Tokyo. Photo by La Carmina. Used with permission.

I'm Different, Just Like All My Friends: Goth Community

It is generally accepted that, along with air, food, water, and shelter, one of the most basic human needs is to feel a sense of social belonging. In addition to this basic need, there is also the oft-held notion that Japan is more conformist compared to other countries, particularly those in the West, and that people there are more likely to adhere to rigid social structures and their concomitant hierarchies in all aspects of their lives. The nail that sticks up will be hammered down (*deru kugi wa utareru*) – anyone with even a passing acquaintance with the study of Japanese society is likely to have heard this phrase, and it is the ubiquity of this and similar mantras purportedly describing the groupism of Japan that make the colorful and shocking fashion subcultures of Japan all the more surprising to those viewing them from the outside, although the emphasis on group identity ensures that individualism is only carried out within a permitted range of conformity (Richie 1999, 72). Yoder asserts that “conformity is idealized in Japan,” and proposes a new maxim to describe “a new, more merciless expression of conformity [that] is at play[:] *deru kugi wa nukareru* (the nail that sticks out is removed) or if you don’t conform as we want, you will be rejected and cast out” (2004, 165-166). While I will later explain that Goth subculture in Japan has its own form of hierarchy and rhetoric of authenticity within the scene, I will begin by pointing out several ways that Goth subculture does, in fact, offer a meaningful space in which participants can escape such conformism and the pressures of their everyday lives, and feel a sense of camaraderie and even equality with other like-minded individuals. Also, since there is a certain comfort to be gained in conformism to a certain group that one wishes to be affiliated with, Goth provides a kind of safe harbor for those who find themselves anchorless as the previously upheld Japanese ideals of marriage and salaried employment lose their attractiveness.

It perhaps goes without saying that individuals approach Goth subculture through the avenues of fashion and music, and Japan is no exception. However, I found that there was often some difference in the ways people described their experiences with Goth, and this depended greatly on whether or not they focused on Goth fashion (a visible identity) or Goth music (a hobby or interest). In this section I will use the stories of two informants as fairly representative of these categories.

Finding Goth Community Through Fashion

I now turn to the story of my informant Megumi, the twenty-five-year-old civil servant mentioned in the previous chapter. In a follow-up interview, I asked her to tell me in more detail about what caused the sense of discomfort, isolation, and dissociation that she experienced during her high school years (which she was “saved” from by Goth subculture). Concerning the discomfort she felt, she told me:

It's because I couldn't always find things enjoyable that everyone else did. For example, during the cultural festival, [students] would perform plays as a class, create lots of events, and on the day of the festival they would walk around and see everything with their friends. Everyone would be practically sparkling and seeming to enjoy the lively wind ensemble and rock band performances in the central courtyard and stuff. Everyone looked like they were having fun, but I didn't have any sense of naturally enjoying myself, so I started thinking, “What? This is weird.” I thought that I should be having fun, but it was a problem with my own feelings, and so I couldn't even force myself to have fun.

In her narrative, Megumi expresses an understanding that she was expected to have fun in the class-based activities in preparation for school events. Her experiences in a Japanese high school are stifling in their imagery, and I was given the impression that the only choices she had were to watch those around her engaged in the school's prescribed activities, or make the painful attempt to participate in them herself. In my own experience as a teacher in a Japanese elementary school, I have found that even the kindest teachers are not always open to displays of creativity that they deem unhealthy. I recall overhearing a group of concerned faculty discussing a seven-year-old girl (perhaps a future goth?) who used "too much black" in her crayon drawings. Having spent five years as an assistant language teacher (ALT) in Japanese elementary and junior high schools, I can readily confirm that such events occupy a significant amount of the schooldays leading up until their execution, and the students who could not find enjoyment in such activities had little choice but to go with the flow and pretend to enjoy themselves. It is likely that similar conditions exist in the experiences of Goths in the U.S. and Europe; however, I would argue that the prevalence of school-wide and class-based events are factors that lead to increased feelings of alienation for individuals who are unable to find enjoyment in such activities. Megumi's discomfort led to feelings of isolation, which she also described to me:

That situation continued, and so eventually my sensations were dulled, as if I were being shown the same movie over and over again. A playing film filled with complete strangers having fun, in which I would never appear. That's isolation. Whenever the class was setting about doing something I didn't have any confidence or didn't have any

motivation and it came to be troublesome to me, and I didn't have anyone to hang out with anyway.

The sense of feeling different from those around oneself and the accompanying sense of isolation are at the heart of the Goth sensibility, as pointed out by authors such as Issitt (2011, 56). In many cases this can lead to dissociation, but as Megumi told me, she eventually found a place to belong within Goth subculture:

I couldn't make it better, so in the end I just gave up trying to have fun like everyone else, and I justified it by thinking that I was just different from everyone else. Now I go see live performances of music I like, such as metal, and I enjoy going to Gothic events. I have fun playing with my band, so it's not as if I don't have any motivation to do anything now.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, her discovery of Goth fashion contributed greatly to her self-confidence, and the community of like-minded (and similarly dressed) individuals was no doubt a part of this. Now a leader and guitarist of a band and the leader of a small Goth community in her home prefecture, Megumi has found a social circle in which she feels fulfilled. On a follow-up research trip, I took the two-and-a-half hour train ride to her home city and witnessed her second public performance at an indoor venue with her band. The venue was small, but had a long history of hosting local bands in the area. I saw the barely suppressed smile, partly from pleasure and partly from nervousness, that adorned her face when she took the stage at the event, and took it as a sign that her days of watching only those around her enjoying life like a never-ending video reel were far behind her.

Finding Goth Community Through Music

While Megumi focused on fashion in her own narrative, some of my other informants emphasized how they were first attracted to music and then adopted the fashion as they became involved in the clubbing scene. I found that in most cases, those who discovered the subculture through music were older (and thus more likely to have been contemporaneous with early Goth bands) and male. The association of fashion subcultures with women has been mentioned above, and thus it should be no surprise that this is the case. However, it is important to remember that nearly all of the influential bandleaders, DJs, and event organizers are male. A representative of this particular stratum of Goth subculture, my informant Takashi is thirty-eight years old, married, and living with his wife of three years in Tokyo. By day, he enjoys his job as the chief manager of a well-known record shop, where he supervises the live streaming video run by the company's website. By night, he is the leader of Japan's most prolific (and perhaps only) gothic-punk⁴⁵ band (formed in 2007), and also a regular DJ at Goth events such as Tokyo Dark Castle and Club Walpurgis. While not of the generation that was making 'positive punk' in Japan at nearly the same time as their U.K. counterparts, Takashi spent his formative junior high school years in the late 1980s, when gothic rock was beginning to decline, but still being discovered by new fans. While still representative of the older generation, Takashi is also someone who became involved in the musical style and subculture after they had already become firmly established.

During the interview, I sat across from Takashi in a curtained-off section of a restaurant called the Christon Café in Shinjuku, Tokyo. As hinted by its moniker, the décor is decidedly Catholic, with Christian icons and statues of the Pietà filling

⁴⁵ This is known in U.S. parlance as deathrock.

alcoves along the wall. In the background I could discern the muffled thumping bass of a DJ set going on upstairs – that particular eventide brought fans a hard-rock themed event, but Takashi had been invited to add a slightly more spooky atmosphere to the proceedings. Pale-faced and ebony-clad, his coat was covered with patches of notable gothic-punk bands and occult symbols, and the top hat he wore gave the impression of some kind of Gothic Willy Wonka. As I engaged in conversation with him he answered with laughs and a toothy grin, telling me about how he came to be involved in Goth subculture.

I've really loved music since I was a child, and I liked The Beatles and Paul Anka when I was three years old. So when I was in the first grade of elementary school – about four, five, or six years old – I listened to nothing but The Beatles, and I liked them. But when I became a junior high school student, I came to like Japanese indie rock. Then in high school... I sort of liked metal, but then after high school, I met punk... after that it was always punk.

Before I put together [my band]...I loved hardcore punk, and I played bass in a hardcore punk band. So from the time I was twenty I loved hardcore punk and punk rock, but I had heard so much that I kind of came to a dead end. It wasn't really the end, but I had listened to so much of the same up until then that I wanted something new. At that time I heard [deathrock bands] Christian Death, Alien Sex Fiend, and Sex Gang Children, and I thought, "This is really cool!"

That was when I was about thirty. When I was nineteen, I first came to know punk rock, and at that time a new world seemed to open up before my eyes... But then when I was twenty-nine or thirty I started listening to gothic, dark wave, and post-punk, I felt like I had opened up another door...there was another world. I like punk, but I also like gothic dark wave. It ended up like that, and so I formed [my band].

...From the time I was twenty years old until I was twenty-nine I was really into hardcore punk. I was energetic and really straightforward in everything, just charging in on the basis of first impressions. With Goth, first impressions are important, but it's more about stopping and listening a bit, being more objective. It's a bit objective and cynical, ironic...because of those aspects I think that is more suited to me personally now. I think that those things are really important now and that Gothic way of thinking matches with me, and so I think I'll continue to have those tastes from now on... From rock there came punk, then from punk there came post-punk and gothic...so it's a kind of counterculture, right? A breaking off from a concrete shape... As I grow up, the "Gothic" within me is also growing up. I think that will keep growing and won't ever die. I think it will continue evolving from now on.

As we can see from his personal account, Takashi first approached Goth subculture through music. While this may be expected due to the fact that he is the leader of a prominent band within Tokyo's Goth scene (well-known enough to occasionally do shows in Europe), the emphasis on music, especially that of the U.K. and U.S., is

something that I found consistent among older fans in general. When I asked Takashi and other informants around his age about how they came into Goth, most mentioned hearing bands like Bauhaus or other influential gothic artists at record stores, which were the main hubs of information on music and associated fashions in the days before the Internet. The sensibilities describe by Takashi are certainly in the vein of punk, and in the interview he described himself as “energetic” and “straightforward,” with a desire to “smash the system.” However, it is interesting to note that he describes his changing sensibilities and growth as a person in terms of the “Gothic” within him. “Goth is not just about fashion,” he told me. “I think that living with your own personal philosophy is a truly Gothic way of thinking, and I think that’s really important.” In short, Takashi expresses an essentialist idea of Gothic in that it reflects the state of his inner self. There is a clear demarcation of punk as being straightforward and aggressive in his narrative, whereas the more introspective, cynical nature that comes with age and experience are associated with Goth. It can be inferred from his narrative that, when he came to a “dead end,” Goth (gothic-punk music, in particular) was what provided him with a way of channeling his cynical outlook into a form of musical (and later sartorial) expression. Also of note is the heavy association with Western music from a young age.

The contrast between Megumi and Takashi is interesting in that it presents two different yet similar patterns of approaching Goth. On the one hand, Takashi’s narrative never seemed to focus on introversion, instead focusing on his being brash, “energetic,” and “straightforward.” He even told me that he was part of the football⁴⁶ team at his high school and listened to thrash metal while pumping iron with his teammates. Later on, however, he mellowed out and took on the more “cynical” and

⁴⁶ This refers to the U.S. sport of football (as opposed to soccer).

“ironic” stance of Goth. Megumi, who began with an introspective loner personality, eventually found an outlet through music, notably metal (rather than the more somber dirges common to traditional gothic rock). In the end, both of these informants ended up involved in a community through their fashion and music choices, creating music and actively participating in events that offer fulfillment in their lives. What other aspects of Goth subculture are attractive to those who participate in it in Japan? In the next section, I will briefly discuss the flattening of hierarchy and relative freedom of sexuality and gender equality that can be found in the darkened Goth clubs of Japan.

Breaking Down the Hierarchy

When many Japanese businesspersons engage in their nightly rituals of drinking and companionship after work, it is often customary for the superior to set a more casual atmosphere in which his underlings can communicate more freely without some of the constraints of hierarchical speech and behavior patterns dictated by Japanese workplace culture. In Allison’s (1994) seminal work on Japanese corporate nightlife, she explains:

When a group of men from the same club come into a hostess club, the highest ranking among them is likely to set the tone with “*Bureikō de ikimashōka?*” (Shall we *bureikō*?) [Let’s not stand on ceremony]. *Bureikō* means a breaking of regimen, courtesy, and demeanor – a release from status and tensions. When status is suspended, the employees are allowed to tell their bosses what they think of them, and the bosses are expected to “forget” everything once back at work. In a similar vein, the employees may be asked for personal or business

advice by their supervisors. The relationships, in short, are psuedoegalitarian (35).

In Japan's Goth subculture, I observed a similar phenomenon take place among the individuals I met there, which was most readily apparent in the use of language in conversations that I had countless opportunities to listen to. While there is no particular hierarchy within Goth subculture in terms of supervisors and underlings, the norms of Japanese etiquette and accompanying language use nonetheless dictate that a more polite register should be used with those who are older than you (or in some other way your senior), in a superior position (such as the organizer of an event or the owner of a bar), or unfamiliar to you. In Allison's case, a formalized hierarchy existed in the workplace but was temporarily suspended during nightlife activities. What I noticed in Japan's Goth subculture, however, was that there was no suspension, i.e. the psuedoegalitarian relationships were, in fact, the norm. One example will serve to illustrate.

After my interview with the aforementioned Seiichirō, fifty-two-year-old IT company worker, the two of us paid a visit to the shop of a mutual acquaintance and body modification artist, Akira. I used the opportunity to observe the way that these two interacted with each other, Seiichirō at the age of fifty-two and Akira at the age of thirty-six. As I suspected of old friends, their speaking style was direct and conversational, without any of the honorifics or humble language that would be expected of a younger man to an older man. What surprised me, however, was when another acquaintance, a twenty-year-old woman, entered the shop with a female friend of roughly the same age. The friend was new to the shop and thus unknown to anyone but her friend, and would normally be expected to speak in a polite style to the others. As a potential customer, it might also be expected that Akira would also adopt

a more distal style toward her. None of this happened, however, and the conversation among all participants proceeded much as it would among close friends or family, regardless of age, gender, or length of relationship. This phenomenon could be dismissed a special exception, were it not for the fact that I observed the same situations recurring among Goths in Tokyo and Osaka, both in and outside of the clubs. This may very well hold true in other leisure-based relationships in Japan, but the important thing to note is that Seiichirō spontaneously quoted it as a specific feature of the Goth subculture. As we walked back to the train station, without any prompting from me Seiichirō smiled and said, “That is what I really like about the Goth scene.” When I inquired exactly what he meant, he said, “I’m much older than anyone else who was there [in the shop], but we could all talk to each other as friends without standing on ceremony.”

It must be stated that, similar to Allison’s observations of corporate nightlife, these “psuedoegalitarian” relationships often exist only within the confines of the subculture. Many of my informants talked of acquaintances at clubs, with whom they could converse freely and enjoy similar hobbies, as “event friends,” or friends that they only met within Goth subcultural spaces. Some, however, did find friendships that extended into the private sphere (*puraibēto de asobu*), and naturally the *bureikō*-type relationships extended there as well. As Seiichirō’s statement above indicates, the relaxed language and behavior etiquette in the subcultural setting is clearly one of the appeals of Goth to its members. I also observed similar linguistic phenomena during my participant observation at events and other occasions.

Alternative Sexualities and Gender Equality

Authors such as Brill (2008) have noted, “Goths usually entertain a high degree of tolerance and acceptance towards unconventional sexual (e.g. gay, lesbian) or gender (e.g. transgender) orientations” (122). This is part of the subcultural ideology (and, to a degree, reality) of Goth subculture in the US and Europe. While Brill noted the prevalence of self-proclaimed bisexuality and open displays of it as a status symbol, my time in Japan’s Goth subculture showed me that spontaneous public displays of affection (homosexual or heterosexual) were extremely rare (the few cases I witnessed always involved non-Japanese individuals), and Goths were not so quick to assert any particular sexual identity. However, I have found that Japan’s Goth subculture has a strong affinity with fetish culture (more in the following chapter), in which open displays of homoerotic behavior between women in the form of S&M performances are standard fare, and cross-dressing is also a very acceptable and lauded sartorial choice for men. Brill, who describes Goth in the US and Europe as a “cult of femininity” (2008, 41), has problematized the idea of Goth subculture’s ideology of genderlessness as in many ways perpetuating the higher position of men, as their androgyny forces women to turn to hyperfemine expressions of style in order to gain status within the scene, since female androgyny is not rewarded in the same way as it is for males. In Japan, however, with its similar subcultures of visual kei cosplay and “women impersonating men impersonating women” (Groom 2011, 200), I discovered that female androgyny (dressing in attire traditionally coded as male) was, while not entirely common, certainly rewarded as a form of stylistic expression. Those females who were able to exude a princely aura similar to what one might find among the *bishōnen* of Japanese anime and manga were often highly complimented

and the objects of praise from other women⁴⁷. It must also be noted that women were also highly prominent in terms of attendance, with the ratio of women versus men at an average Goth event being roughly 60/40 according to my estimates.

The acceptance of open homosexuality (and other alternative sexualities), particular among men, is also a feature that I noticed in Goth subculture. Zin-François Angélique, the name adopted by the leader of pioneering Japanese Goth band Madame Edwarda, is a transgender individual with a female persona who plays an influential role in the Japanese Goth subculture. Known as Zin or Zinny (pronounced “jin” or “jinny”), he⁴⁸ was responsible for the formation of the very first Goth club events in Japan (see Introduction), and continues to perform as a DJ, organize events, and play with his band within Japan’s Goth subculture even now. His darkly elegant and androgynous style, charismatic vocals, and penchant for traditional gothic rock have earned a strong following, especially among older female fans. Rampo⁴⁹ is another major player with an androgynous style who is also openly homosexual. Responsible for jumpstarting the Tokyo Goth scene around the turn of the millennium by starting up various events, Rampo is a fashion plate who brought cybergoth chic to Tokyo and worked as a model and store clerk for the colorful *wa-cyber* brand Takuya Angel, based in Harajuku. He was also a very popular DJ who drew a loyal following in Tokyo before moving to Berlin in 2011 to pursue the underground scene there, organizing events with a distinctly Japanese and queer flavor. In Tokyo an entire night is dedicated to an outspokenly homosexual bartender and his flamboyant drag persona, and another openly gay man is active in the band Auto-Mod (who claim themselves as Japan’s first Goth group) and other musical projects, and is a highly

⁴⁷ It should be noted in this connection that, in the sometimes overlapping subculture of cosplay in Japan, females dressing up as male characters/individuals is generally the norm.

⁴⁸ I have taken the liberty to arbitrarily use the pronouns corresponding to Zin’s original biological sex in this paper.

⁴⁹ This name is provided with the express permission of the informant.

respected figure in the subculture. Suffice it to say, homosexuality is certainly not a barrier to success in Japan's Goth subculture, and may even serve as a status symbol.

Gother Than Thou: Subcultural Factions and Rhetoric of Authenticity

While the Goth community in Japan, as described in the paragraphs above, certainly does offer a haven for individuals to discover the social acceptance that they are oftentimes unable to find elsewhere, tolerates and even celebrates participation of non-Japanese and individuals embracing alternative sexualities, and allows for a certain flattening of the hierarchy that pervades social interactions in most social spheres, the subculture is not without its own forms of hierarchy and even discrimination. While it may not be immediately visible on the surface, upon interviewing many individuals in Tokyo and Osaka's Goth scenes, I found that there were often very clearly defined factions (*habatsu*) that formed around certain event organizers, DJs, and artists. In addition, there was also a very clear rhetoric of authenticity that was reliant on not only difference from the mainstream, but also the ability to be distinguished from those who were fake or insincere in their approach to Goth subculture, which is usually defined not only by the clothing that a person wears, but also by the kinds of music that he or she listens to. Also, despite the generally even mix of males and females within the subculture, I found that on many levels there was still a very strict (yet unspoken) division between the roles of men and women within the subculture. I will discuss these issues throughout the following section using the words of my informants and my own experiences of participant observation to help to describe and elucidate the deeper workings of Goth subculture in Japan.

Factional Strife

During what one might call my “honeymoon period” in Japan’s Goth scene, I was first struck by the overwhelming friendliness that I encountered among the Goths there. Of course, this acceptance was heavily influenced by my ability to speak Japanese and the fact that I wore makeup and immediately recognizable Japanese Goth clothing brands, but I nonetheless naïvely gained the impression that the subculture was free from the internecine strife I had witnessed in my limited experience among U.S. Goth subculture. While it is certainly true that Goth subculture offers a comfortable space for individuals on the level of attendees, the more access I gained to backrooms, the more I realized that there were rivalries between event organizers and band members, and a great deal of gossip would occur among certain individuals.

For instance, three major monthly events in Tokyo would frequently draw Goths in significant numbers, two of which often fell on the same date. Although on the surface there was a pretense of helping each other, the two organizers frequently engaged in what might be termed passive-aggressive tactics. One organizer might provide flyers for their events to be distributed at the reception desk of the other event, with the other organizer might go to the event personally to advertise and recruit for their own events. Having become the staff member of one event, there was a strong implication that I was expected to not attend the other event, especially if it fell on the same date. Loyalty to certain bands and certain individuals could determine which events a Goth would or would not attend, while others made it a point to float among events without becoming overly involved with any particular one. As might be expected, due to the limited number of Goth-related events in Osaka, I could discover no significant feuds, although after long observation I eventually detected rivalries

among body modification artists involved in Goth subculture there. Of course, exclusivity and distinction are important in the creation of identity, and when a person has been in a subculture long enough, it might become necessary for them to further define themselves against others within that subculture.

Rhetoric of Authenticity in Goth Fashion and Music

In the previous chapter, I discussed Japan's various homegrown adaptations and offshoots of what would traditionally be considered Goth subcultural fashion and music, such as Gothic Lolita attire and visual kei musicians. The acceptance of these derivations as legitimate among younger fans is clearly visible in the aforementioned musical group of my informant Megumi, which advertises itself as a "Gothic & Lolita band" playing covers of rock, metal, and visual kei tunes, in addition to original songs. When I witnessed their live performance, one of the songs was actually a cover of Iron Maiden's "The Fallen Angel." For Megumi, Gothic Lolita fashions, as well as non-Goth genres such as heavy metal and visual kei, are just as valid for Goths as the more traditional styles inspired by bands such as Bauhaus and Siouxsie and the Banshees. The fact that Megumi considers the broader genres of rock, metal, and visual kei as suitable material for the Goth band's repertoire indicates that the definition of what is Goth has become somewhat flexible, a phenomenon I observed among many fans under the age of twenty. However, the definition of what is Goth is often highly contested, as evidenced by the thoughts of Yoshiki, a forty-year-old DJ and leader of an electro-gothic unit. He said:

In the past in Japan there were people who dressed in punk fashion but didn't listen to punk music, and they were kind of bullied as being "fashion punks," so I think Goth is pretty much like that, too. With

fashion, you know, someone will be wearing Goth fashion, but when you say, “What kind of music are you listening to?” they say, “Visual kei,” and that’s no good. If you’re wearing Gothic clothing I think it’s better to listen to Gothic music.

Yoshiki is quite vocal in his views about the intrinsic relationship between Gothic music and Goth fashion – so much so that he even administers his own community on Japanese social networking service Mixi titled “If [you’re] wearing Goth, [you should be listening to] Goth music.”⁵⁰ Yoshiki also does not equivocate in the description of the community: “Gothic [fashion] is a genre derived from music, and so it should continue to be carried on together with music!! Just as fashion punks are made fun of, it is time for an era when fashion [Goths] are also made to feel shame!” (Mixi 2013). The description includes a warning that if posts about events are found related to visual kei then they will be summarily deleted. His evaluation of visual kei music reflects the underlying attitude that most of Japan’s active visual kei bands are inauthentic and untalented compared to U.S. and European bands, but he doesn’t dismiss Gothic Lolita fashion outright. “I think it’s cute, and I like it,” he says. “Then again, I think it would probably be best if the people wearing Gothic Lolita would listen to Goth music, too. It’s kind of become an icon of girls who like visual kei music, you know? That’s a bit unfortunate. Of course, there are Gothic Lolitas who do listen to Goth music.” It may seem ironic then, that Yoshiki played a set of Japanese rock music at one of the events I met him at, including songs by pioneering visual kei band X Japan; however, the roots of visual kei have little to do visually or musically with what is commonly associated with the genre today.

⁵⁰ In Japanese, the group is titled 「ゴス服着るならゴス音楽」 (*gosufuku kiru nara gosu ongaku*). As of April 21, 2014, there were 143 members.

While Takashi, mentioned in the previous section, is certainly less virulent in his opinions about fashion than Yoshiki, he is nonetheless still engaged in the rhetoric of authenticity that insists on tracing gothic rock and its associated fashions back to their punk origins. He said:

Probably, Japan's Gothic DJs all love 80s gothic rock and post-punk, but the attendees who came to the Goth events in Japan don't really understand that... In Japan, if you have even a slight interest in Gothic, I think it's fine to listen to dark electro. But for us, we want to teach everyone about the punk side of Gothic and show it to them, and that's why I'm doing [my band]. At the same time, I don't think that gothic-punk is the only [legitimate] kind of Gothic music. Everyone's free [to like what they want]. So in that respect I don't want to be picky or try to lecture people on that stuff. But with my own band, I do want to show that gothic is something that came from punk, yet I understand that gothic is not just one single form – it's very free and varies among people, and I want to show that aspect as well... what's important is that, if it were to become 'only' dark electro, I would feel rather sad."

While very careful to assert his rhetoric of freedom to enjoy whatever music one pleases, it is nonetheless clear that Takashi would lament the loss of the 'authentic' style of gothic music – one that has its roots in the same punk genres that he was exposed to as a young man. It might be said that he is a kind of missionary, not wanting to "lecture," but still hoping to gain understanding from the younger generations in Japan who have not been exposed to the kind of gothic-punk that his band performs. As with Yoshiki, there remains an underlying concern to police genre lines and ensure that people wearing Goth clothing are properly educated in Goth

music – in this case, its roots. Ultimately, however, it seems that such attitudes toward fashion and music are not detrimental to the enjoyment of the scene, and rather illustrate a posture of older fans helping younger fans to better appreciate the subculture.

Interestingly enough, such attitudes toward music can also be discovered among those in their twenties, although the ways of thinking between those in their twenties and those who are older may in fact be very different. Take, for example, a young woman named Kiyoka. At twenty-nine, she is among the age group of Goth participants that found their links to Goth subculture through the Internet around the turn of the millennium. When I first met Kiyoka, who almost never ventures out (aside from going to her job as a sales employee) without donning a corset and a rather complicated assortment of belts, buckles, and numerous formidable spiked accessories, she took no pains to hide the fact that she was a Goth and an aspiring Satanist no less (see Chapter 3 for more details). Upon comparing our musical tastes, I found that she rejected any and all Japanese music in favor of exclusively Western artists, and the same applied for films. An avid fan of the horror genre, she informed me that she refused to watch any of the J-horror films such as *Ring* (Nakata Hideo, 1998) and much preferred gore and slasher films like *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and the *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake (Marcus Nispel, 2003).

To gain a better idea of Kiyoka's élan for Goth music, I decided to invite her to a rock bar owned by the former vocalist of a visual kei band. There, amidst countless rock and metal posters and shelves lined with albums, all topped off with a touch of Halloween-style kitsch, I told the owner that we were both interested in Goth music. He put an old live concert of Bauhaus, generally regarded as the first gothic rock band, into the DVD player, and it was not long before I was nostalgically

reveling in the deep, echoing vocals of frontman Peter Murphy. One can imagine my surprise when I was broken from my reverie by Kiyoka, who asked, “What is this? This isn’t Goth.” Of course, I was not nearly as flabbergasted as I may have been had the same comment come from an American or European, but I was still rather shocked when she professed no knowledge of Bauhaus or any of the pioneering gothic rock artists that I mentioned. It came out that, despite her professed allegiance to Goth, her tastes actually ran more into the black metal⁵¹ sounds of second-wave⁵² bands like Gorgoroth and Dark Funeral, along with the more aggressive strains of electro-industrial to be found in aggrotech⁵³. While Yoshiki and Takahashi were more concerned about genre distinctions, Kiyoka was more likely to distinguish between what was Japanese or non-Japanese. It can thus be observed that rhetoric of authenticity may vary across generational lines, but is always present in some form or another as a way of defining the boundaries of a subculture and one’s identity within it.

It must be clarified that my informants Takashi and Yoshiki, mentioned above, do not limit themselves in the music they enjoy and, as I said, Yoshiki even plays the occasional Japanese rock set at more rock-oriented events. While their preference for Western music is clear, the very fact that they are leaders of bands in Japan precludes the notion of rejecting the possibility of Japanese musicians creating worthwhile Gothic music. Their purism instead centers on a specific definition of what Goth music is and, while it is broad, still does not include genres like black metal (despite

⁵¹ Black metal is a subgenre of heavy metal that originated in Scandinavia and usually features extremely fast drumbeats, distorted guitars, and screamed vocals. Lyrics and imagery are often Satanic and/or anti-Christian in nature.

⁵² The second wave of black metal is generally viewed as beginning in the early 1990s, and is often characterized by more unified style of guitar playing and the adoption of Satanism as an ideology rather than mere symbolism.

⁵³ Aggrotech is an electro-industrial variant that is characterized by aggressive bass lines and pitch-shifted vocals, usually featuring dystopian or militaristic themes.

many visual and thematic similarities). In the case of Kiyoka, who is only a listener and not a musical artist, her rhetoric of authenticity has shifted away from musical boundaries and instead focuses on the origins of the music itself (non-Japanese or Japanese), regardless of whether or not it is classified within the gothic rock genre. Despite the sometimes-conflicting rhetoric, however, it was clear to me that such issues did not result in any major disruptions in the enjoyment of participants, and the club events in Japan still served as subcultural spaces for community creation on the basis of mutual aesthetic tastes.

Perpetuated Gender Roles

Throughout my time in Japan's Goth subculture, I have met women who were event organizers, DJs, fashion designers, models, and owners of bars or restaurants. As mentioned above, the proportion of women in attendance at Goth club events is almost invariably higher than that of men. However, in reality, I discovered that gender equality is mostly an illusion in Japan's Goth subculture, as normative gender roles are generally perpetuated within the clubs and other subcultural spaces. Among the organizers of the four major Goth-related events that I frequented (one in Osaka, three in Tokyo), only one of them was organized by a woman and, as of this writing, she put her event on hiatus and now runs events under the umbrella of one of the larger events (run by a man). Megumi's band is an exception to an almost exclusively male population of musicians and artists in Japan's Goth subculture, and female DJs are few and far between. As a result, most women are attendees, models, or working in some way in the fetish scene (more in the following chapter). Of course, there are some very influential positions held by women, but my observations have shown that,

like visual kei⁵⁴, Japan's Goth subculture is androcentric in terms of its internal power structures, while at the same time offering a larger amount of freedom for women than that the mainstream music industry would allow, as I will now explain.

Subcultural (Goth) Capital

The above discussions of fashion and music bring me to the subject of subcultural capital, discussed in the Introduction and discussed further in the following chapter. By way of background, in analyzing the ways that people negotiate their positions in society, Pierre Bourdieu discusses the notion of “fields.” As explained by Richard Jenkins in his exegesis of Bourdieu’s works, “a field...is a structured system of social positions – occupied either by individuals or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants. It is also a system of forces which exist between these positions; a field is structured internally in terms of power relations” (Jenkins 2002, 85). Like manifestations of Goth subculture in other countries, the Goth scenes in Osaka and Tokyo may be considered as forms of “fields” in this sense and, as seen in the accounts of my informants above, defining the subculture is an important part of maintaining one’s status within it. As Bourdieu (1991) stated, “Every field is the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field” (242). Power relations on an economic and social level are clearly visible in terms of those who run the clubs, play in the bands, and sell the merchandise, defining the positions of power vis-à-vis access to goods or resources within that field, which are referred to by Bourdieu as “capital.” Jenkins explains the goods, or capital, as being “principally differentiated in to four categories: economic capital, social capital (various kinds of valued

⁵⁴ The genre of visual kei is, for all intents and purposes, exclusively dominated by males with a largely female fan base.

relations with significant others), cultural capital (primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another) and symbolic capital (prestige and social honour)” (Jenkins 2002, 85). While various kinds of economic and social capital certainly play important roles, as a relatively small subculture bound together by shared enthusiasm for specific types of non-mainstream music and fashion, the Japanese Goth subculture is very much concerned with cultural capital in the interactions among its various members. Thornton (1995) has already taken up this point in her work on subcultures, where she discusses the idea of subcultural capital. As mentioned previously, subcultural capital is a concept developed by Thornton to describe how, although subcultural participants reject the common means of gaining cultural and social capital within the perceived mainstream society, they nonetheless form microstructures of power within the subculture and negotiate their identities and positions within the subculture on the basis of subcultural capital (1995, 163). As shown in the previous section, clothing and musical tastes are very much indicative of one’s authenticity in Goth subculture in Japan, but subcultural capital also involves the level of commitment to Goth as well. Hodkinson has demonstrated the usefulness of that concept in describing Goth subculture in his work on Goths in the UK, since “as well as referring to levels of status at the level of perception and consciousness, [subcultural capital] allows us to capture the practical rewards liable to be afforded to those who achieve it and the lack of social opportunities for those who do not,” rewards which, in Hodkinson’s observations, “most obviously took the form of attention, friendships and romantic opportunities” (2011, 81). Due to the often very specific nature of subcultural capital within Goth subculture, I might propose the (perhaps not so original) term “Goth capital.” While certainly applicable to Goth

subcultures in the U.S. and Europe, I would assert that its implications are different in Japan, as will be described in more detail in the following chapter.

Vying for Goth capital can be observed in Japan in a variety of ways, most clearly in the aspect of personal appearance. Wearing appropriate Goth clothing, particularly in styles that are elaborate, (acceptably) unusual, and customized, often ensure that one will be approached for conversation or a photo op by fellow Goths, as will application of detailed and unique makeup. Numerous ear and body piercings, tattoos, and even subdermal implants and scarification (see the following chapter) are all methods of gaining Goth subcultural capital, so long as they are done in ways that are aesthetically pleasing (to Goths, at least). While not specifically associated with “traditional” Goth style, body modifications such as these can be especially valuable in proving one’s “realness” and dedication to the scene, as they often entail the loss of capital in other spheres of life (for example, when applying for jobs in a non-subcultural context). Goths may also bank on displays of knowledge about Goth music or related films, literature, etc., as well as recounted experiences of overseas Goth events such as Wave-Gotik-Treffen (WGT)⁵⁵ in Germany. As indicated by Yoshiki’s narrative above, such knowledge or interest can take precedence over mere physical appearance, and superficial Goth accouterments without accompanying Goth capital in terms of knowledge can lead to being dismissed as inauthentic or a “fashion Goth.”

Other individuals may attempt to gain Goth capital by getting close to a particular “star” in the Goth firmament. Thus, a rare *purikura*⁵⁶ photo session with Rampo can become a valuable source of credibility, proof of which can then be

⁵⁵ WGT is an annual Gothic music festival held in Leipzig that usually draws up to 20,000 attendees from around the world.

⁵⁶ *Purikura* is a Japanese contraction of the words “print club,” referring to special photo booths in Japan that are popular among young people, which include beautifying features and various ways of decorating the photos.

uploaded to social networking sites such as Mixi, Facebook, and Twitter to reach a large number of other Goths who will be impressed by it (the photo becoming proof of social capital within the subculture. Some Goths may follow a path from simply dancing and listening to working as staff at an event, starting a band, performing on stage, selling their own clothing or jewelry designs, becoming a DJ, or even hosting their own events. Nowadays, social networking services and the Internet in general play an important role in the accumulation of one's Goth capital, and a suitably eldritch pseudonym for use online and in the clubs is often essential in this. Hodkinson noted that in the UK Goth scene of the 1990s,

Subcultural capital...manifested itself not only in the way individuals looked but also in other indications of practical commitment, notably the depth of their subcultural knowledge, the size and appropriateness of their collections of records, fanzines, posters and other artefacts and the frequency and exclusivity of their practical participation (2002, 83).

The rewards can range from friendship and romance to free admission/drinks and a considerable amount of fame within the scene.

Summary

This chapter has elaborated on the various ways that Goth subculture serves as a valuable and meaningful community for those who participate in it. Through club events, a real community of mutual acquaintances is created, and networks of friends can easily spread among Tokyo, Osaka, and other cities. At Goth events, individuals drink together, talk together, and dance together as they listen to the music that they enjoy and watch performances that they appreciate. The ability to share a wide range

of aesthetic tastes in a safe environment is what takes Goth subculture beyond a mere imagined or online community based on a single interest. As shown through the story of Megumi, Goth offers an identity and also a community for those who are unable to find enjoyment in the socially dictated activities of school and work in Japan. The flattening of social hierarchy, which is built into the structure of the Japanese language, in psuedoegalitarian relationships is also an appealing feature, as those with similar interests can quickly interact and socialize with one another, sometimes leading to meaningful relationships outside of the subculturally mediated interactions of “event friends.” The subculture is also favorable to female participants, as well as those with alternative sexualities, such as Rampo and the other Goth individuals mentioned in the chapter who are highly respected in events and musical circles. Nonetheless, despite all of the positive aspects, it is clear that there is a very clear rhetoric of authenticity within the subculture that discourages certain clothing styles and requires a concomitant level of subcultural capital in terms of musical knowledge. Authenticity is often based on knowledge of “authentic” Goth music and fashion from the West, since the foreignness of Goth is an essential source of appeal for many of the individuals that I encountered. It is also important to remember that this emphasis on authenticity is very much related to the sense of community, and bolsters a sense of belongingness among those who share the same tastes and opinions. Factional politics exist on the higher levels of Goth subculture in Japan, and gender norms of the larger mainstream society are perpetuated within it as well. In conclusion, however, the relatively small nature of Japan’s Goth subculture and overlaps with other subcultures make it a comfortable space for those who have embraced the darker side of life, leading informants like Megumi to go so far as to say that Goth “saved” them.

Chapter 3 – Rituals & Religion

In January 2013, my research took me from darkened clubs echoing with the pounding bass lines of aggrotech and industrial anthems to a psychedelic wonderland of alternative sexualities and kitschy camp aesthetics in Tokyo. Advertising itself as a “salon” with the objective of communication rather than a club or discotheque, Department H is held on every first Saturday of the month for “people who aren’t into drinking and dancing.” While alcohol and dance can be found there, the former cabaret club features a large stage with an eight-meter-tall ceiling faced by two mezzanine floors that serve as lounge areas above the lower floor, where various stalls offer goods and information to support a wide spectrum of fetishes and kinks. On the stage itself, drag queens strutted and sang with every inch of their bodies and faces covered by elaborate latex costumes and masks, while a massive projector screen showed clips of rare U.S. exploitation flicks from the 1970s and disco house rang out from the DJ booth. Audience members mingled among the tables and lounge areas, some in full S&M gear replete with leather, D-rings, and ball gags, and others simply in various states of undress. Ages ranged from young people in their early twenties (a strict ID check ensured that no minors entered the venue) to those in their fifties and sixties. Tattoos, piercings, implants, and scars were visible, and I recalled that Department H was notable for its regular suspension performances and for popularizing the “bagel head”⁵⁷ saline injections that received a great deal of media attention in late 2012. And there in one corner, lurking amid clouds of hookah smoke, I spied a small group of ebony-clad Goths soaking in the atmosphere of the event.

⁵⁷ “Bagel head” saline injections are a temporary form of body modification that involves injecting a sterile saline solution into the forehead to cause swelling. Someone then presses his or her thumb into the dome-like projection that is formed, leaving an indentation similar to the center of a bagel. The effect can last roughly six hours, and injections are sometimes made to inflate the lips or scrotum as well.

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the ways in which fashion and subcultural knowledge are accrued by individuals in the form of subcultural, or Goth, capital. In this chapter, however, I look beyond mere clothing to examine more socially suspect bodily expressions and aesthetics that are prevalent among Japan's Goths, namely, more permanent and extreme forms of body modification. Due to the small size of the subculture, movement among similar underground events is extremely fluid while aspects of fetish and body modification events have bled into Goth events and vice-versa. In recent years, new forms of body modification from overseas have become more readily available in Japan's underground club culture, including Goth events, although they are still socially unacceptable in many ways (explained further in Chapter 4). For my informants, body modification represented a valuable form of self-expression that, like the instances of fashion mentioned above, was often assigned what I would term "ritualistic significance." In this vein, the chapter explores the highly visible aspects of body modification subculture that have been syncretically fused with Goth subculture in Japan to a degree beyond what may usually be observed in American and European clubs, particularly focusing on performances like suspension. Finally, it is explained why symbols associated with the occult and Satanism that are typically shunned by Goths in the US or Europe are more prominently embraced within the Japanese subculture, and how they are incorporated in the rituals and even philosophy of some Goths in Japan. I argue that, in the face of dominant social stigmas against body modification in Japan, body modification offers not only autotelic enjoyment, but also self-expression and sublimation of negativity in a ritualized form, and that occult/Satanic elements of Japan's Goth subculture can serve as positive ritual elements to empower individuals and help them find fulfillment in alternative identities.

Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger: Body Modification as Performance and Ritual

I have often fielded a question directed toward me at conferences and during casual conversations about Goth and body modification⁵⁸ in Japan: Is body modification something specific to Goth subculture in Japan? The answer is most assuredly, “No,” as body modification has a history that extends as far back as humanity itself, but this resounding negative is not without its qualifications, as I discovered that there is a great deal of overlap among Goth subcultural spaces and events focusing on what is termed *jintai kaizō* (usually translated as “extreme body modification” by its proponents). Goth subculture has been noted to include piercings and tattoos among its typical accoutrements, but the primary academic literature on U.S. and European Goth mentioned in the Introduction glance over such aspects rather perfunctorily, focusing (correctly, in those cases) on fashion and makeup as the definitive aspects of Goth chic. However, from a more general conceptual standpoint, it may be pointed out the Gothic tradition has always been concerned with the body and the ways in which it can be modified. Spooner (2007) explains that, “...it could be argued that contemporary Gothic’s preoccupation with freaks, scars, diseased flesh, ...and, above all, blood is an attempt to reinstate the physicality of the body in an increasingly decorporealized information society” (63). Groups specializing in body modification in Japan with names like “Modern Freaks” and “Smart Freaks” would certainly seem to embrace and celebrate the pariah status embodied in Gothic antiheroes like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly’s archetypal creature, who is spurned by both his creator Frankenstein and the rest of humankind because of his horrifying appearance and superhuman abilities.

⁵⁸ Throughout this paper I choose to use the term “body modification” rather than “body art,” since the English “body modification” and its nearly literal translation *jintai kaizō* (人体改造) are used almost exclusively in Japan’s subculture.

In terms of my informants, I found that all but one had ear piercings (the single exception being a male IT company worker). This is hardly surprising, given the popularity of single piercings even among men as a fashion statement. However, I also found that more than one-quarter had facial and tongue piercings (seven people) and tattoos (six people).⁵⁹ In order to gain a better understanding of body modification in Japan, I thought it best to go to the source, and so I approached a prominent practitioner who goes by the name of Akira. At the age of thirty-six, Akira sees his own body as a work of art, telling me that he was initially inspired to modify his body after seeing the decidedly Cronenbergian cyberpunk film *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (Tsukamoto Shinya, 1989). He claims to have transformed into the “Iron Man” that he set out to become. Akira and I took a seat in his shop, where we are surrounded by stuffed and mounted animals and various taxidermic specimens, along with shelves filled to capacity with rare and unusual books in both Japanese and English on subjects ranging from anatomy and zoology to bestiality and methods of execution. On the television behind him, gruesome scenes are playing from a VHS copy of the infamous *Faces of Death* shockumentary (directed by Conan LeCilaire, 1978) – Akira revels in his own self-professed “bad taste.” Covered in tattoos and sporting multiple implants (both subdermal and transdermal⁶⁰), he is not only a piercer but also a popular artist and DJ at Goth events, and is responsible for all of the major suspension performances in his region. His work includes everything from standard earlobe piercings to scarification (intentional scarring using a scalpel) and subdermal implants (shaped objects, usually silicon, inserted beneath the skin). While piercings are his main source of business, he tells me that he receives around two customers per month who request to have a subdermal implant. Even considering the

⁵⁹ See Table 2 in the Appendix for a breakdown of body modifications among my informants.

⁶⁰ Subdermal implants are objects buried completely under the skin, while transdermal implants are objects only partially placed under the skin with some part exposed.

possibility of return customers, this is a rather significant number given the extreme and permanent nature of the modification. One of the first things I asked Akira about was his own definition of Goth, which he replied to by saying:

I think the sense where you say, ‘That’s gross – I like it!’ might be Goth... Thinking, ‘That’s cool because it’s so decadent’ – liking things that are ‘opposite’ – I think that’s probably what ‘Goth’ is. The sensibility of the general public is that things that are decadent are not good, and they tend to see them as negative. So when you say instead that those things are good, that you resonate with them – that’s what I think a Goth sensibility is.

In simple terms, Akira told me, “When you like what everyone else thinks is disgusting, then you’re Goth.” Throughout our conversation there was always an explicit or implicit comparison with the “general public” (*ippanteki na saken*), “the world at large” (*ippan no sekai*), and “regular people” (*ippan no hito*), reiterating the binary distinction that I often found among my informants between the normal, mainstream society and the underground culture that they chose to identify with. While I briefly established the conceptual relationship between Goth and body modification above, I also questioned Akira and other informants who were involved in such activities about how these two subcultures are interrelated for them. I found Akira’s response rather enlightening, as he continued from his description of Goth:

I happen to have a good answer to this – I get the feeling that ‘doing things that take you past the point of no return’ is a kind of Gothic sensibility or spirit of people in the underground [subculture]. This is also something far removed from the world at large. For regular people, a thing that can’t be undone is just something that you don’t do.

Whether it's getting a tattoo or some kind of body modification that deforms your body, they say you shouldn't do it... The proactive desire to do something like that – that's exactly what I'm involved in.

How do body modifications that take one past the point of no return offer meaning and fulfillment for those in Japan's Goth subculture? Throughout my interviews I found similar themes in the reasons that people gave for engaging in such activities. Daniel Rosenblatt (1997) describes this kind of prevalent subcultural ideology as a "metacommentary" (298). In *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (2003), Victoria Pitts describes four themes of such metacommentary that she found among radical body modifiers in the U.S.:

(1) to celebrate the discoveries of "body play" (which mine the body for pleasures and other affective experiences); (2) to promote technical and anthropological knowledges of bodies; (3) to cultivate provocative bodily performance; and (4) to articulate the body's symbolic significance. The shared meanings of body modification emphasize bodily self-ownership; personal, cultural and political expression through the body; and new possibilities for gender, sexuality and even ethnic identity (14).

As will be described further below, I found that my informants in Japan were likely to engage in body modification practices for similar reasons, although ethnic identity did not play a part. Unlike the U.S., however, I found that even less extreme forms of body modification such as tattoos and piercings more often had serious cultural stigmas attached to them, and so the assertion of personal control of the body almost automatically extended to a rejection of cultural norms about the body, such as those

based on Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto principles as described by Miller (mentioned in the Introduction).

Interestingly enough, I found that Akira, as both a participant and practitioner in extreme body modification activities, did not attempt to put what might be perceived as an overly positive spin on his work or those who engage in it. He did, however, have a clear mission that seemed to stem from a desire to push the subculture in Japan further in the direction of the themes delineated by Pitts. When I asked him if there were anything else he would like to tell me about Japan's body modification subculture, he replied by saying,

I think it would be great if [Japan's body modification subculture] would rapidly become healthier [*kenzen*]. For me, I've been enjoying this world for the past 13 or 15 years, and back then [when I started] there were a lot more people who were sick [*byōki*] – now the number of people like that is slowly decreasing, but at its roots there are a lot of people [in this subculture] who are sick. If you were to ask what kind of sickness they have, it's not that they have a weak heart or a bad liver, it's that they're mentally sick. After all, it seems that it's for the sake of obtaining some kind of identity that those people get unusual piercings or body modifications and get involved in underground [culture], but I think it would be great if the situation would become more and more clean and healthy.

Akira made an implicit comparison with himself, telling me that at one time he was truly living out the punk philosophy embodied in the Sex Pistols' infamous lyrics, "No future." A former heavy smoker and drinker, he has given up tobacco entirely and has only occasional drinks, the impetus being a serious warning from his doctor

that his lifestyle would soon have serious implications. He explained that he now lives a very healthy lifestyle, and he is extremely meticulous in maintaining a clean and hygienic environment (I even noticed a sign in his shop's restroom demanding that male clients sit down when urinating for sanitary reasons). Being physically healthy and mentally healthy seem to be two sides of the same coin for Akira.

You can say that this [body modification] culture itself is a sick and ill [*byōki de yanda*] culture, but I personally am really healthy in comparison, and so all the more I think it would be good if the culture moved in a healthier direction. Since I'm the one who is piercing, I witness a lot of people with sick minds (*kokoro o yanda*) who get a piercing to try to gain an identity. So while I'm doing that [piercing] I feel a bit unsure of myself. They say they want me to do it so I do it for them, since that will satisfy them. But I know that it's not like anything is going to change...nothing will change. Yet, young people who are a little weak will be drawn to these things, and once they get one, they want another, and yet another, thinking that then they can change themselves even more. That's a mistake. Nothing will change. And so I take a breath and hope that it doesn't become something that they can't undo [and regret]...that's my job. Whether or not they cross that absolute edge and are unable to stop I think really depends on the individual's mental strength and healthiness of his or her mind. So in that sense, I'd like people within this culture to, as much as possible, move in a healthier direction.

With tattoos covering most of his body, stretched earlobe piercings, heavy facial piercings, and subdermal implants in his hands and arms, Akira's physical appearance

might not impress most “regular people” with the image of a “healthy” subculture, but he is committed to improving the scene so that more and more people can enjoy it for a longer time, even offering lifestyle advice to his clients and fans (whom I have overheard affectionately referring to Akira as an older sibling). Akira said:

There's something for the future. I want those who are in their teens now to enjoy [body modification] into their twenties and thirties, and I want to have those in their twenties to think about the future and continue enjoying it in their thirties and forties. If those with mental illness go too far into this kind of culture, in many cases it's a dead-end, and that's really unfortunate. If you do the kind of thing that goes nowhere and takes you beyond the point of no return with nothing left to do, then in the end the general public won't approve and will continue to have nothing but a bad impression [of body modification].

I think that we can't leave impressions like that one after another. I'm the one performing [the body modification] and it's fun, and I realize that [modifications] are a meaningful way of adding color to one's life, therefore I believe it's necessary to leave good impressions with the public. I really think this is a role that I need to fulfill. This is why I tell my customers not to do illegal drugs⁶¹ or have unsafe sex. I think that this is really important.

The concern about leaving “good impressions with the public” is particularly interesting. While there are, no doubt, clear advantages to being able to work openly without fear of legal repercussions, the length to which Akira and other modified

⁶¹ As a brief caveat, in all of my years involved in Japan's Goth subculture and time spent in the backstage rooms and private areas of events, I have never found any visible evidence of illegal drug use during Goth subcultural events. This stands in contrast with London Goth events at venues like Slimelight, where an acquaintance familiar with the scene told me, “Everybody here is on something.”

informants went to avoid causing a stir when they were out among the “public.” I noticed that many would wear long-sleeved hoodies or shirts, even in warmer weather, to cover their tattoos while on trains, and Akira confirmed that he also avoided flashing too much ink in areas outside of Amemura. While certainly not thinking of themselves as problems to society, the Goths I interviewed in Japan were clearly aware of their marginalization and avoided causing unnecessary disturbances to those who would misunderstand them. While wishing for greater acceptance, people like Akira nonetheless realized their own position and the enjoyment that can come from being different.

As a well-respected figure in the Goth and body modification subcultures, Akira’s words carry weight with those around him. However, I was curious if there really were so many “mentally sick” individuals engaging in the scene, and if Akira’s baleful prediction that “nothing will change” was true for my other informants who were not practitioners. I now turn to four of my informants, who each offered different explanations for their activities, but shared a common conviction that their body modifications were a positive aspect of their lives beyond simply “adding color to one’s life.” Divided into pairs, they represent two major patterns that I discovered: those who enjoy modification for its autotelic nature, and those who link their modification with their mental and emotional states and find meaning through such rationalizations.

Modification as Autotelic Play

I discovered a wide range of reasons behind permanent body modifications, some surprisingly mundane and others rather profound. For the following two informants, body modification was simply a way of enjoying themselves and finding

pleasure through pain and performance, falling under the first of Pitts' themes – to “mine the body for pleasures and other affective experiences” (2003, 14) Mayumi, at the age of thirty-seven, is a single woman living with her parents and working as a sales clerk. Due to her job and her chosen Goth attire (an adult elegant Lolita style), she has so far limited her permanent body art to one tattoo on her upper arm. She tells me that the Gothic foliage design was based on an antique candleholder that she found in France and fell in love with at first sight. “I wanted it to have [the candleholder] no matter what, but the price was so expensive that I couldn't buy it,” she explained. “So, they let me take a picture of [the candleholder]. I was so crazy about the design that I imagined it would be nice to always have it close to me, so I had [the design] tattooed on me. I feel like it was a destined encounter!”

As we talked, I found out that she also enjoyed some of the performance aspects of body modification, including blood play⁶², which involves using needles or razors to inflict wounds and cause intentional blood flow. In my own experience, the models for such shows are always female, some cutting themselves and others having a partner to do this for them. Of course, a high level of trust is necessary, since larger blood vessels are often intentionally targeted in order to gain a more dramatic flow. “I like blood play! It's like I can feel the beauty of life in the comfortable pain I feel at the moment the needle passes through [my skin],” she told me matter-of-factly. When I asked her if this might be related to self-harm, she replied in the negative.

I think it's different from the feeling people have when they're doing self-harm. For blood play, if you haven't built up a relationship of trust [with the other person], you have a high risk of getting sick or other

⁶² In Japanese, *ryūketsu* (流血) simply means “blood flow” or “bloodshed,” but in a subcultural context it refers to the intentional use of blood in a performance.

problems. I think it's an extreme beauty, formed from the combination of the beauty of life and that relationship of trust.

Mayumi, whose *hime* cut hairstyle⁶³ and Rococo-esque one-piece dress exuded an aura of youth that belied the fact that she is approaching forty, spoke of having needles piercing her flesh in front of an audience as a beautiful experience completely divorced of any self-destructive aspects. For her, this performative body modification was not a sign of being “sick” in her mind.

When I first met 23-year-old Saya in an underground concert venue to celebrate the third anniversary of a Gothic and fetish-themed bar, she was sitting on a stage in a high school girl uniform, calmly watching as large six-gauge (four-millimeter) hooks were carefully inserted into several places on her body: three in each leg, two in each arm, and two in her chest. Soon, she would be suspended from the ceiling upside down with her arms spread apart, essentially an inverted crucifixion. Of course, I could not help but find out what had led her to engage in such a shocking performance. She was all smiles (revealing a piercing in the frenulum of her upper lip) as she gave me what some might consider a rather prosaic explanation:

When I was in my teens I often used to go visit a tattoo studio – I don’t have any tattoos even now, although I keep thinking I want to get one though. Anyway, that studio was also a piercing shop. When I was fifteen, nine years ago, I remember there was this body modification magazine from overseas, and in it there were several pages of suspension pictures. I was fifteen and so I didn’t know anything about it [laughs]. It was the first time I had ever seen pictures of suspension, and so I was looking at it, thinking “How painful! What kind of person

⁶³ A hairstyle featuring long, straightened hair with a frontal fringe and usually cheek-length sidelocks. Such hairstyles can be observed in noble women from Japan’s Heian period (794-1185 CE).

does something like this?” [laughs] At that time there might have been suspension events going on somewhere in Japan, but from the age of fifteen I always had a longing to try it, and I kept thinking how nice it would be to try it just once in my lifetime.

It so happened that at just that time, the boyfriend I was dating was an apprentice piercer and studying piercing, and I watched him get implants in his forehead and things like that, and I had a longing all that time [to do body modification myself]. Even though I wanted to do suspension, all along I arbitrarily thought that it wasn’t really something I could do, and so I never really talked to anyone about it. I had heard Akira’s name and I knew that he was doing suspension and other body modification, but I had never met him and really wanted to, and so when I went to get a piercing a friend introduced him to me, and that’s where it all started I guess.

When I told Akira that I really wanted to go to an event where I could see him doing a suspension show, he turned to me and said, “Do you want to be hooked up?” I said, “Yes!” and I was able to be hooked up and do suspension for the first time. The pain quickly faded and I soon started smiling and enjoying it – it was a totally happy feeling. From then I did it a second time and then a third time, and I want to keep doing it [laughs].



Figure 6 - Example of a suspension performance. Photo by Keroppy. Used with permission.

I realized that perhaps I had been unintentionally searching for something in her narrative that would confirm what I had heard from Akira, specifically that he often

witnessed those who were mentally ill seeking an identity through body modification. Although I had no way of determining the presence or absence of any mental illnesses in my informants, in the cases of Mayumi and Saya, I found that the autotelic nature of body modification seemed to provide fulfillment for them without any rationalization on their part. This kind of autotelic body play echoes in many ways the findings of Sato mentioned in the Introduction, who found that despite the tendency to pathologize dangerous behaviors among the bikers he studied, he found that the activities often provided satisfaction in and of themselves as “mere play” (1991, 36). Things were not always so simple, however, as I found in my conversations with the following two informants.

Modification as Self-Transformative

Self-professed Goth and black metal aficionado Kiyoka (mentioned in the previous chapter), did connect her own emotions and negative feelings with her body modification. She gave me the following explanation for one of her tattoos, the design of which features a decidedly Manichean theme:

This tattoo is really important as representing my own policy – there are both negative and positive aspects in you, right? Because of that, you suffer a bit – it’s like a battle – so I wanted to express that part of myself...in some ways it also shows my own frustration with myself for being lukewarm – I’m not really good and I’m not really evil.

She later revealed to me that, in her younger years and, to some degree, even now, she struggles in her family life, particularly dealing with a parent who suffers from a clinically diagnosed mental illness. She said:

I used to get really angry sometimes and break things. I hate people and I hate myself, and my fashion and tattoos kind of express my dark side...I haven't done anything like that [breaking things] since I found Goth...it really helped.

Despite her much vaunted misanthropy, Kiyoka nonetheless lives with her parents, holds down a job as a sales clerk, and socializes with friends (also Goth subculture members), and seems to live a balanced life as far as I could ascertain from our interactions. Much like Megumi (Chapter 2 above), she was "saved" by her involvement in Goth subculture and, in this case, body modification. In a way, her tattoos were both a permanent reminder of her own policy and, judging by the effects, a kind of self-transformative ritual. As Akira indicated, however, her appropriation of something that cannot be undone – her tattoos – goes beyond mere fashion and may earn considerable disapprobation from those around her.

While Kiyoka's negative emotions were directed outwardly in the form of fits of anger, my informant Hitomi, a worker at a fetish bar, once directed her destructive impulses toward her own body. She told me that, "Everyone gets depressed sometimes. But for Goths and people like that, there are lots of images of cutting yourself and suicide, so it becomes an option." Now twenty-nine, Hitomi claims to have more than 200 self-inflicted scars concentrated in one particular area of her body, and a cursory inspection proved to me that it was no exaggeration. Her problems were mostly based on romantic relationships with the opposite sex, but by the time she turned twenty, she tells me, she had moved on. She informed me that she now has nearly twenty piercings in each ear and several microdermal piercings as well. She also had a large scarification work done recently by a well-known artist, which would

seem to be an artistic sublimation of her past self-harm, a channeling of those negative energies into a creative form.

As these examples show, for my informants, artistic body modification was not necessarily associated with any pathological issues and, if it was, it served rather as a kind of self-transformative ritual for them. Whether the experiences with body modification were intentionally performed for those purposes or simply retroactively rationalized as such by these informants is something that we can never be absolutely sure of. I believe what is more important, however, is the fact that, in any case, body modification is an important aspect of their identities as they struggle to find meaning and fulfillment in their lives. In the next section I will examine some of the prominent aspects of Japan's Goth scene that I noticed in relation to religion: Satanism and the occult.

Sympathy for the Devil: Identification with Satanism/Occultism

As a native Pennsylvanian with a conservative Christian upbringing, one aspect of Japan's Goth subculture that struck me as somewhat shocking was the heavy prevalence of Satanic and occult imagery. I noted a preponderance of diabolic imagery particularly in the Kansai region, where most Goth and Goth-related events are organized by Ken, a musician, DJ, and designer who exerts his influence from a small shop in the heart of Osaka. Located in the basement floor of a nondescript building in the Shinsaibashi area known as Amemura⁶⁴, its small anteroom is lit by the glow of a crimson sigil of Baphomet, a stylized version of the Satanic symbol that serves as the shop's logo. Beyond an eerily creaking metal gate one finds a darkened

⁶⁴ A contraction of “*Amerika Mura*” or “America village,” in the 1970’s Amemura was a center for fashion imported from the West Coast of the U.S., hence its current appellation. Amemura remains a hub of underground nightlife and youth fashion/music subcultures.

space that is covered floor to ceiling with shelves and displays of everything from the latest gothic industrial CDs and books on magic to oddities made from bones and antique jewelry with Satanic and occult symbols. Over the ominous ambient music, visitors may even hear the raucous cry of Damien, Ken's pet crow that he keeps in the back room, named after the child Antichrist in *The Omen* (directed by Richard Donner, 1976). The smell of incense is thick in the air, wafting from an altar that stands before a life-size statue of the Baphomet (the infamous Eliphas Levi version of which covers Ken's back in tattoo form). Ken also designs his own line of items such as T-shirts, hoodies, caps, and assorted accessories, all featuring Satanic and occult designs. The sigil of Baphomet is nearly omnipresent, and I noticed leather bracelets featuring Ken's design on the wrists of Goths not only in Osaka and Tokyo as well, and I found that wearing one myself offered a readymade entry to conversations with various people, as Ken and his brand carry much clout (and Goth capital) in the subculture.



Figure 7 - Accessories from Ken's shop featuring 666 and the ubiquitous sigil of Baphomet. Photo by author.

In fact, I found that much of the occult and Satanic imagery swirling around Japan's Goth subculture focused on the enigmatic Ken, who had studied ritual magic in New York City and I found to be very knowledgeable about Western magical tradition. However, the presence of magic and mysticism in the subculture goes beyond a mere personality cult, as I discovered from my own research and the accounts of my informants that major works on Western occultism have been widely available in Japanese translation since at least the 1970s. Many informants professed a familiarity with the works of Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (1928-1987), who helped to popularize the works of the Marquis de Sade through his Japanese translations, and also wrote essays on de monology and black magic. Informants also told me of a magazine titled *My Birthday* (published monthly from April 1979 to December 2006), which, while aimed at teenage girls, included among its horoscopes and love charms a

considerable amount of legitimate information on Western mysticism and magical tradition.

The comparatively large presence of the occult and, in particular, Satanism, in Japan may be understood not only in terms of the relative lack of deep knowledge of Christian (and anti-Christian) symbolism in Japan, but also the moral panics surrounding Satanism and the occult that have been a component of mainstream consciousness in the U.S. since at least the 1980s. Gavin Baddeley, in his chronicle of the relationship between the Devil and rock music, *Lucifer Rising* (1999), explains how the Christian-fundamentalist right spread Satanic conspiracy theories through the 1980s and early 1990s and, while such claims have been thoroughly debunked, they have nonetheless had an influence on how Satanism (a philosophy that, in most forms, does not encourage criminal behavior) is viewed by the general public in the U.S. (1999, 140-143). The lack of such negative media attention and the relatively small influence of fundamentalist Christian thinking are what allow Satanic imagery to have a relatively innocuous presence in Japan. What I found in Japan's Goth subculture, however, was that, far from being a mere aesthetic choice, such symbols often held a powerful resonance with the individuals who inhabited its subcultural spaces.

Satanism and the Occult as Symbols of Rebellion

Despite the extremely low percentage of professed Christians in Japan, I was surprised to discover that many of my informants were quite knowledgeable about Satanism and the Devil of Judeo-Christian thought, although their attraction toward such diabolic imagery often relied more on a romanticized Miltonian or Byronic image of the archfiend as a noble rebel. My informant Takashi, leader of a gothic punk band in Japan, summed it up nicely when he told me:

For me, I don't have anything like a religion. This is what I think, and I'm not a Christian so I don't know what Goths in other countries are thinking, but I think it's fine to have a religion and live with some kind of belief. For me though, I want to live my life by making my own rules and putting myself first. The reason I like the Devil is because, when I was a child I thought he looked cool...at first, at first [laughs]. But as I gradually became an adult and thought about the meaning – with Christianity or Christians, there is Christianity and the Devil, and the Devil is against something. That's what I think; I like that kind of stance. So in the past, when I liked hardcore punk, it was like "smash the system," and that kind of straightforward way of expressing things, and me liking the Devil now is the same. So Christianity is like the system, and the Devil is against the system. That's the image I have, and it's like a story with the Devil standing in for something else, a metaphorical expression, a kind of example...it's not straightforward, but in that metaphorical sense I like the Devil even more.

The Luciferian rebellion against tyranny is certainly a powerful image that lends itself to the Goth lifestyle. Turning to my informant Yoshiki, whose opinions on Gothic Lolita fashion were given in the previous chapter, I also questioned him on the prevalence of the occult and Satanism in Goth subculture and the ways he incorporated it into his own image. His accessories often include a large sigil of Baphomet in the form of a heavy silver pendant, although the imagery of his band relies on symbolism from the Cthulhu mythos, a cosmology of malign deities developed by influential American cosmic horror author H.P. Lovecraft (1890-

1937)⁶⁵. “Those things are about a way of thinking,” he explained. “I think there is a certain [occult] aspect to things. For me they’re icons symbolizing ‘darkness.’” While he claimed to have no specific religion, he also informed me that he did have certain beliefs and ideas about what Satanism represents. He explained:

Being a Satanist is quite compatible with [the idea of] freedom, whereas Christianity is more restrictive and I don’t really like that. I was actually taken to a church and made to sing hymns...so the people around me...they were going so I just kind of got taken along with them...it was extremely constrictive. It was like being forced, with no freedom...so I have this memory of it being very constrictive and I didn’t like it. So, as a reaction to that, [I was attracted to] the exact opposite kind of things. You know, there are branches of Satanism that talk about freeing your mind, right? Like, releasing yourself and becoming free through the Sabbatic [rituals]...Satanists and pagans are quite similar, aren’t they? ...In that respect...you know, from when I was young I was into rock and stuff, so I have never been a “model student” following what the world says, so I feel a lot of resonance with that kind of free thinking.

Contrary to my expectations that Satanic imagery was adopted purely aesthetically in most cases in Japan’s Goth subculture, I found instead that many had an understanding of at least the basic philosophy behind it, and several had negative experiences with religion when they were young. When I asked about his background with Christianity, Yoshiki replied “Being taken to church completely turned me off to

⁶⁵ Not only immensely popular among Goths even in Japan, Lovecraft’s occult pantheon has a certain measure of status in the ranks of modern Satanism, as evidenced by the inclusion of the Lovecraftian “Ceremony of the Nine Angles” and “The Call to Cthulhu” in Anton Szandor LaVey’s tome, *The Satanic Rituals* (1972).

it.” His elementary school experience of being taken to church by a classmate’s family left a negative impression with him. “Even though I was young, I could tell it was not normal,” he explained.

Both of the informants mentioned above made it clear to me in my interviews with them that they did not consider themselves Satanists. Even Ken, whose self-perpetuated aura of mystery seems to have forced him to decline my repeated requests for an interview, revealed to me that he did not associate with any one particular religion, although his knowledge of Western magic and mysticism became clear to me throughout our conversations, and his soft-spoken but charismatic nature has had a significant influence not only on Osaka’s Goth scene, but also, as I found, on the ways in which some of my informants identify themselves. The following section looks at these informants, all female, who claimed to be Satanists or strongly identified with Satanism and demonology.

Satanism and Mysticism as Identity and Religion

Pure chance brought me to my twenty-four-year-old informant Kaori, when I happened to stop by the S&M bar where she was working part-time behind the counter. Of course, the small nature of Japan’s Goth subculture and my various connections made through participant observation allowed me to quickly strike up a conversation based on mutual acquaintances, foremost among which was Ken. Our conversation quickly turned to matters of the occult, and I discovered that Kaori was an avid enthusiast of the occult, although she admitted to me that her lack of English skills, a paucity of information available in Japanese, and the dearth of similarly inclined individuals around her had hampered her sedulous self-studies up until this point. Nonetheless, her dedication to the occult was apparent in the way she spoke,

telling me that her favorite demon is Amdusias, a Great King of Hell listed in the *Ars Goetia* said to be in charge of making music in the infernal regions. She learned of him from Ken, who, clearly aware of the resonance between himself as a musician and that particular demon, often incorporates its name in the seals and sigils that adorn his shop's products. The most powerful image for her is that of the Baphomet, the Sabbatic Goat generally associated with Satanism, although her human idols were mentioned in nearly the same breath.

I believe in Baphomet-*sama*⁶⁶ and make lots of detailed requests, and he always grants them. I always make sure to give thanks and be really grateful to Baphomet-*sama*, and I just repeat that process. Ken-*san*⁶⁷ is like my master [*shishō*] in life and also my music teacher, and I often ask him about things in my life and for romance advice. He's a really kind person. I want to become a cool adult like him and Akira-*onēchan*.⁶⁸

Her eyes would light up whenever the conversation turned to Satanism or the occult. “Baphomet-*sama* is totally amazing! I’ve pledged myself to continue my gratitude toward Ken-*san* and keep worshipping Baphomet-*sama* even in the next life!” she told me with a smile. While hyperbolic, to someone like Kaori, who confided that she lost both parents at a young age and currently lives alone, Ken is something of a father figure to her. While her “worship” of the Baphomet may not be something that one can find in a published book on Satanic doctrine, it was clear to me that she found great comfort in her reliance on the image and in her studies of demonology. She tells

⁶⁶ The honorific suffix *-sama* is used to denote great respect in Japanese, and is used to refer to persons (or, in this case, beings) of significantly higher rank.

⁶⁷ The honorific suffix *-san* is the most commonly used “default” for showing respect in various situations. I keep the suffixes intact here to show indicate the nuances of Kaori’s speech.

⁶⁸ Literally meaning “older sister,” Kaori’s use of the suffix denotes playfulness and, most likely, also reflects her view of Akira as a non-threatening, non-sexualized older sibling figure.

me her next project is to start studying the Christian Bible, in the hopes of enhancing her understanding of demonology.

It should be mentioned here that Kaori, as a girl working at a fetish bar, is part of the night work [*mizu-shōbai*] described in the Introduction and elsewhere in this paper. As a young woman who was bereaved of her parents and received only a high-school education, Kaori most likely faced a dearth of employment opportunities and was effectively channeled into the entertainment industry. Kaori is not alone, as one quarter of my informants (five out of the thirteen female informants) were working in bars (four of those cases were Goth-related fetish bars). Based on my observations, this ratio seems to hold, as I encountered many younger Goths in Tokyo and Osaka who were working at least part-time in bars, or had done so at some point in the past. According to Mock, such women “gain considerably in terms of social and economic independence, but pay a substantial price for that independence” (1996, 190). I argue, however, that the price is always relative, and the overlap between Goth subculture and night work in Japan enables someone like Kaori to express herself in her work, thus making her employment and subcultural participation practically one and the same. Her workplace, a fetish bar with Goth elements, is full of occult imagery, and her coworkers share similar tastes for dark music and Goth subculture. Her position in her workplace has allowed her to make many connections, and she told me that she hoped to host her own Goth music event with an occult theme in the near future. In this way, Japan’s Goth subculture and night trade go hand in hand, creating a space for marginalized individuals like Kaori to find fulfillment even in what would normally be considered an undesirable profession.

For my informant Kiyoka (mentioned above), the label of Satanist was one that she adopted and embraced, placing it prominently in her Mixi profile description.

Every time we met I noticed she wore a large silver inverted cross and other accessories featuring the ubiquitous sigil of Baphomet. One of her tattoos also features an inverted pentagram and 666, the Biblical number of the Beast described in the Book of Revelation 13:18. She told me that she had been interested in the mysterious and the occult since elementary school, often reading the occult information magazine *MU* (pronounced “moo”), a publication that since 1974 has proclaimed itself a “super mystery magazine challenging the riddles and enigmas of the world.” While the magazine often focuses on UFOs and UMAS (Unidentified Mysterious Animals), she eventually discovered Western mysticism and Satanism through the Internet and, of course, from Ken. When I asked her what the symbols meant to her, the reply she gave was somewhat tongue-in-cheek:

After all, they represent my beliefs...they vent out things that I'm unable to express, like anger, sorrow – it's self-expression...I have no interest [in Christianity] so I don't think about it at all...[if someone asked me why I wear them] I would say “because I hate justice [laughs]. I hate justice and things that are good.”...I really think that way.

While she has never actually performed any rituals, she sometimes uses power stones and purifies them to maximize any effects they might have, and also uses incense. She told me that she would often consult with Ken about her life, and used incense recommended by him to bring about positive effects.

Mai, on the other hand, a twenty-four-year-old trading company employee and self-professed Goth, her interest in the occult stems in part from a negative reaction toward her parent's religion:

I basically don't believe in any religion. My parents were originally involved in a weird new religion [laughs]. It's called Happy Science...it's weird too because even though it's a religion it calls itself a science. They entered into that religion and I *really* hated it...this was when I was a child...I couldn't believe it – it was too clean, overnice...when I was a child I didn't understand it, and I was a bit brainwashed, too, but as I became an adult I gradually realized that something was wrong. So to counteract that, it may be that I ran toward things that were dark and Goth, like a backlash [laughs]. From the start I have never really had any faith, and I don't like the idea of going through life while being dependent on something. So I find [the occult] interesting, like *A Witches' Bible* [Janet and Stewart Farrar, 1996], I have that book...I have it, but I don't have that kind of faith. I look more at the kind of proverbs that are in it.

Although she tells me that she has no faith in such things, she also admits with a laugh that she has experimented with throwing curses. Rather than Ken, however, Mai informed me that she gained most of her knowledge from foreign web sites (her English is fairly proficient) and also from the owner of another Amemura shop who specializes in fortune telling with runes. "I think that people who go deeply into Goth will eventually come across the occult," she told me. "I think they're connected." However, it seems clear that her negative reaction to her parents' religion has in some ways influenced the particular path that she has taken in her pursuit of Goth. Although there are Christian churches (including the Mormon church) that actively proselytize in Japan, it was instead a homegrown new religion, Happy Science, that set Mai off

into casual study of the occult, and perhaps this also kept her from embracing a more anti-Christian or Satanic philosophy.

After speaking to the informants that I have described so far, I was impressed with the fact that Satanism and the occult provided meaningful symbols for some, and even deeper ritual significance for others, as the imagery itself was complexly intertwined with Japan's Goth subculture in various ways. This was especially fascinating to me since, from my own research and experience in U.S. Goth subculture, the Satanic and occult aspects are often avoided or even shunned by American Goths for the reasons mentioned earlier. Instead, Satanism and demonology were appropriated and localized in new and intriguing ways by my informants who found deep meaning in them

Summary

In this chapter, I explored two aspects of Japan's Goth subculture that I found to have a ritualistic, symbolic, or religious meaning for my informants. Permanent body modifications, such as tattoos, implants, scarification, and certain piercings, as well as temporary performances like suspension and blood play, can be viewed largely as having two purposes that are not mutually exclusive: autotelic play and ritualistic sublimation. Informants who focused on the former, such as Mayumi and Saya, were ebullient in describing their hobbies and quick to dismiss any association with self-harm behavior. Their actual psychological states notwithstanding, the important fact is that they rationalize their activities as play in such a way that my informant Akira would regard as "healthy." On the other hand, some of my informants did attach a very deep significance to their body modifications, with the experience of getting them as a kind of self-transformative psychodrama. It is telling

that the more permanent modifications, particularly tattoos, which can have explicitly symbolic imagery, were more likely to prompt an explanation that in some way reflected the internal state the individual.

The second subject examined in the chapter involved aspects of Satanism and the occult, especially their associated imagery and practices. For Yoshiki and Takashi, the Devil was a Gothic archetype of romanticized rebellion and freedom, a symbol of all things dark and resistant against the mainstream. Those like Kaori and Kiyoka, however, were more likely to look to images of Baphomet and Satanism as cynosures for their lives, as mediated through individuals steeped in occult knowledge such as Ken. Particularly for Kaori, the substance of such ideas was distilled into a more pellucid form that served as her identity and also a source of comfort for her. The pursuit of her interest in the occult was also facilitated by her work in a fetish bar, which, while considered deviant in mainstream terms, was an opportunity for financial gain and simultaneous participation in Goth subculture, and her occult interests were a source of fulfillment and enjoyment. Whether mere symbol or religious inspiration, the occult aspects of Goth in Japan are a conspicuous and important part of how many of informants formed their cultural identities.

Both body modification and Satanic/occult imagery can be viewed as self-destructive and dark by those outside of the subculture, but in this chapter I have made it clear how my informants took those practices and symbols that are perceived as negative and adopted them as autotelic and self-transformative rituals for themselves. The foreign-originated aspect of the subculture also makes it attractive to those in Japan who feel distanced from the constraints of their own society. As a subculture in Japan, Goth complicates ideas of graduation (as have been observed in Lolita, *bōsōzoku*, etc.) due to the enduring nature of its associated identity and the

permanence of body modifications that are becoming increasingly prominent among Goth individuals.

So far, Goth capital has been explored within the context of the subculture in which it is rewarded. The following chapter, however, will examine some of the ways in which Goth capital can reduce cultural and social capital in other contexts – specifically what would be considered “mainstream” society in Japan – and how my informants negotiated their Goth identities within those contexts.

Chapter 4 – Negotiating Goth Identities: What Will Your Family Think?

In the previous chapters, I have looked at Goth fashion, community, and body modification largely from within the subculture itself in order to provide a general picture of how various aspects of Goth were appropriated by my informants and incorporated into their cultural identities. While some potentially negative aspects have been pointed out, I have argued that, overall, Goth subculture, and especially its symbolic and ritualistic aspects, can function as positive outlets for negative emotions generated from feelings of alienation or inability to conform to social expectations. Such functions offer fulfillment and a sense of belonging within the subcultural context; however, the focus of this chapter will be on the ways in which Goths must perform balancing acts to varying degrees in maintaining their subcultural Goth capital while simultaneously retaining mainstream cultural and social capital in their lives outside of the subculture. Since all of my informants had graduated high school, I will focus mainly on the balance they maintained between their Goth predilections and their family lives and the professional commitments to their various jobs. Some informants were able to make a living completely within the subculture, but the majority of those attending the events found employment outside of the subcultural domain. This chapter also raises the concept of being “Goth for life,” something that my informants unanimously agreed was a perfectly plausible idea, since Goth as an identity is not incompatible with aging or pursuing typical life goals such as steady employment and raising a family. In conclusion, the implications of such lifelong identity will be discussed, along with the potential impact of such choices in terms of larger (sub)cultural trends in Japan’s society. I argue that the continuing acceptance of

Goth as a subcultural identity and the growing acceptance of permanent forms of subcultural Goth capital (such as body modification) in Japan are indicative of a larger disillusionment with mainstream cultural capital and values that is changing the way individuals in Japan make choices about their lives.

Social/Cultural Capital vs. Goth Capital

In previous chapters, I discussed a few of the multifarious ways in which Goths in Japan used the Goth fashion aesthetic, community, and ritualistic aspects as ways of channeling and sublimating negative emotions or experiences. My informant Megumi lived something of a dual existence as both a civil servant at a city hall and the leader of a Goth band and community within her prefecture. Seiichirō, a fifty-two-year-old IT company worker, also worked hard to maintain both his job and his family while simultaneously playing in a band and attending important subcultural events. I will take up these and other examples in this section in order to look more specifically at the ways in which individuals balance their social and working lives with their identities as Goths, and some of the repercussions that their acquisition of subcultural Goth capital can have on certain aspects of their lives both now and into the future.

To look at a more extreme example first, I turn once again to Akira, the body modification artist mentioned in the previous chapter. His numerous piercings (including numerous facial piercings), tattoos, subdermal and transdermal implants, and split tongue are certainly aesthetic choices allowed by, and even expected of, his profession. However, I was extremely curious to hear how his family reacted to his rather extreme transformation into a walking visual encyclopedia of modern body art techniques. When asked how they felt about it, he explained:

They're surprised, I think. If I had been born and raised in Osaka, graduated high school, and then, because I wanted to do my own thing, started working as a freeter while getting piercings, more and more tattoos, adding implants, and splitting my tongue...if they had seen the whole process they would have thought "Ah, that's how it is." But in my case, I've been away from my family home for so long, since it's so far away – I hadn't visited for ten years [at one point] – I was busy. During that time I had become rather decorative in various ways, and I just appeared on their doorstep, so they were like "Huh?" [laughs]. They were surprised. "You've changed in a lot of ways!" [they said]. But they could see that I was healthy. "Right, I've changed in a lot of ways, but I'm doing my job using my own skills, making a living with that money, and I'm not causing any troubles to anyone – rather, people are happy with what I'm doing, and so I'm living a very fulfilling life these days" – I explained that properly to them. Little by little they came to say, "That's good for you "...We never fought about it or anything, and I go back to visit every New Year holiday to spend time with my family, too.

Akira's story of acceptance is complicated by the fact that, in Japan, the legal status of tattoo and body modification artists is a complicated and complex one. According to Article 17 of Japan's Medical Practitioner Law, only licensed doctors are legally qualified to perform medicine, which puts tattooing, piercing, and other body modifications that involve needles and/or surgical operations, in a distinctly gray area. When I asked if he had informed his family about the nature of his profession in legal terms, he replied:

I haven't said anything [about the legal aspects]. If I say that I think it really would be a big shock to them. "Our own son is knowingly doing a dangerous job on the edge of the law" ... If they knew that I think they would be very averse to the whole thing. So I lie and say, "Oh no, it's not illegal. Everybody comes to be saying they want me to do it, so I do it for them and no one complains about it. That's just the culture of Osaka" [laughs].

As discussed in the previous chapter, however, Akira is very much concerned with making body modification subculture and, by extension, Goth subculture, into a healthier one, both mentally and physically. In his shop I notice various accreditations for his piercing skills, and he is extremely thorough when a customer comes (which more than one did during the course of my interview with him) in explaining in great detail the process of the piercing and how to take care of it. The first question he asks is whether or not the body modification in question will cause any detriment in their family or working lives. This is worth noting, as it is counterintuitive to the assumed reasoning behind getting such a modification in the first place – to rebel against such social institutions. In my experiences at tattoo and piercing shops in other Asian countries (Hong Kong and Thailand) and the U.S., I have never encountered this kind of warning. However, I found that not only Akira, but also other piercers in Tokyo would give similar warnings to each client, in addition to having them sign a waiver.

Akira also gives advice to aspiring young piercers who come to him for guidance. He continued:

On the other hand, now when young people come to me saying "I want to be a piercer" and "I want to work as a piercer in Osaka," I tell them straight up. "[This kind of job] is really dangerous and very risky, so

you should give it up, for your own good.” For my parents, well, as long as I’m in good health I think they would be okay with it, but I still haven’t told them [about the legal issues].



Figure 8 - Goth-style tattoo with sigil of Baphomet pendant. Photo from anonymous source, used with permission.

Aside from legal issues, however, there are also numerous disadvantages that one can face when one has Goth capital in the form of body modification. Piercings are usually removable with negligible scars left behind afterward. However, there is another form of body modification that has a much longer, and more complicated, history in Japan: tattoos. Documented at least as early as the fifth century BCE in Japan, the presence of tattooing shifted from a decorative body art to a mark for criminals and untouchables from the sixth century CE onward, and government restrictions in the Edo period (1603-1867) forced the tattooing culture to move underground. It eventually resurged sometime after 1750, but still remained associated with laborers and especially yakuza gangsters (Sperry, 1991). The heavy influence of Western-style tattoos and attitudes toward them have altered the acceptance of body ink in Japan, but there remains a strong bias against them as

evidenced by numerous cases of discrimination against those with tattoos. For instance, many public hot springs (*onsen*) and baths (*sento*) have signs strictly prohibiting the entry of those with tattoos, and the same is sometimes the case for gyms, golf clubs, pools, and beaches. I even found restaurants in Tokyo that ask guests to cover up their ink before entering the establishment. Tattooed individuals may also face difficulties in obtaining life insurance, bank loans, and rental contracts. The association with yakuza gangsters is usually used as an excuse, but the stigma is attached to any and all forms of body art, regardless of nationality or culture. In September of 2013, just hours before the announcement of Tokyo's acceptance as host city for the 2020 Olympic games, a Maori woman was banned entry from a Hokkaido public bath for her facial "ta moko" tattoos, which were a symbol of her tribe and a mark of respect. A remark from an official of the public bath adequately sums up the culturally sanctioned reasoning behind discrimination against those with body art: "Even if it is traditional culture, it is difficult to expect other patrons to understand the difference between one tattoo and another. A typical person cannot judge the context behind the tattoos" (Japan Today 2013). It is difficult to imagine that a "typical person" could confuse the simple black tribal markings on the chin and lips of a grey-haired, non-Japanese woman with the elaborate and colorful Japanese designs seen on arms and backs of exclusively male, exclusively Japanese yakuza members. It should also be noted that, among the Ainu native people of Hokkaido (a group historically and currently subject to racial discrimination), it was common for women to have tattoos around their mouths. Regardless of this statement's implications for cultural understanding among people in Japan, it is clear that the stigma against body art is deeply rooted and most individuals are unwilling or unable to understand them. A conversation with a middle-aged Japanese woman that I have

known for nearly nine years also proves this point. “You’re American, so I understand that you have a few tattoos and that’s fine. If you got more...if you covered your whole arms with tattoos, I don’t know if I could let you visit our home anymore. I know it’s not rational, but that’s just how I feel.”

Kiyoka, one of my tattooed Goth informants in the previous chapter, told me that she made the decision to get her tattoos with the full knowledge that doing so might hamper her employability and marriageability in the future, although she has so far had no problems working in clerical jobs with her tattoos safely covered from sight. Unfortunately, this may not be enough for some civil servants in Osaka, as certain members of the government have placed increasing pressure on civil servants who have gone under the needle. In spring of 2012, Mayor Hashimoto Tōru of Osaka Prefecture launched a crusade against tattoos in the government after a civil servant reportedly showed his tattoos to children in order to intimidate them. In May of that year, 33,546 government employees were requested to take a survey on whether or not they had any tattoos, and of those that responded, 110 admitted to having them. Hashimoto made comments to the effect that they should leave their city posts and find work in the private sector instead (Aoki 2012). Several hundred workers refused to respond to the survey, claiming that it was an invasion of privacy, and were subsequently threatened with disciplinary action (Japan Today 2012). I was told by one of my informants, body modification photographer and journalist known as Keroppy⁶⁹, that one should not put too much stock in the political antics of Hashimoto, who is known for his inflammatory comments meant to appeal to Japan’s hardliner constituency. It is also true that Hashimoto has since resigned, after facing a storm of criticism over comments made about the necessity of “comfort women” used by

⁶⁹ This name is provided with the express permission of the informant.

Japan in Korea during World War II (Asahi Shimbun 2013). His comments on tattoos nonetheless provide evidence that such opinions are common in Japan, and when raised for political ends the subject can have a direct impact on the lives of those who have them.

In such an environment, even the increasing acceptance of tattoos as a fashion statement (exemplified by prominently inked pop stars Amuro Namie and Hamasaki Ayumi) has yet to make the decision to get such body art an easy one. Goth fashion and subcultural styles originating outside of Japan often include tattoos and piercings, which are relatively more acceptable in their countries of origin. For example, the American Academy of Dermatology reports that, in a 2004 survey of five-hundred people between the ages of eighteen and fifty, 24% said that they had a tattoo and 14% reported a body piercing other than the ear lobe (AAD 2014). It is safe to assume that, ten years later, this percentage has only gone up. Although it may be difficult to make sweeping generalizations based on a sample of 500 individuals, it can be assumed that the real number is not significantly lower or higher, and the fact that nearly one-quarter of the population may be inked is certainly a testament to the acceptability of tattoos in U.S. culture. However, in Japan, as evidenced above, a subcultural individual's desire to emulate Goth fashion plates may lead to tension between the desire to accumulate Goth capital and the wish to take on certain occupations or avoid discrimination in daily life.

My informant Seiichirō admitted to me that he would like to get a tattoo, but he found that the inconvenience in his daily life wouldn't be worth it:

They're troublesome! After my live performances, I wouldn't be able to go into the large bath at the capsule hotel [I usually go to] in Amemura [laughs]. I really like [baths] like that. It's, you know,

inconvenient. If I could put up with the inconvenience it would be okay to get one...so at events I have [someone] do [body] painting for me.

Options such as body painting and even temporary tattoos may be sufficient for someone like Seiichirō, whose family, job, and predilection for Japanese baths make it less than desirable to have a permanent piece of body art. As seen in the previous chapter, however, some of my informants find deep meaning in their tattoos and choose to get them regardless of the consequences.

In terms of fashion, I found that almost all of my informants had no adverse reactions from their parents. In terms of their working lives, those who were not in subculture-related jobs told me that they did not engage in Goth fashion in their workplaces. However, I found that, for some, even the knowledge of their sartorial choices outside of the workplace among their coworkers could result in derision or unpleasant comments.

I can't dress like this [at work]...[but] people know about it [laughs]...I've been told, "Aren't you too old to be doing that?" [laughs]...I'm twenty-four...That's terrible, right? [laughs]...Old guys don't really get it. "You can have children already, can't you?" they say, since I'm married now. "How about getting serious and dressing normally?" I've been told that before.

She told me that she had never told anyone but a close coworker, but word spread fast and she soon received comments from the older men in her office. She tells me that she lets it roll off of her back, although it is clear that personal choices in fashion outside of the workplace can still have an effect within the workplace. Other female informants with clerical jobs told me that their penchant for black has earned them

nicknames like “witch”⁷⁰ that, while usually intended to be jocular, are sometimes irritating.

Whether hidden or not, body modification and fashion choices in the private sphere can have a significant impact on the lives of Goths in Japan – more than in the US and other Western countries, in some cases. Why then is Goth still embraced as a lifelong identity by my informants and other participants in the subculture in Japan?

Goth for Life?

In addition to its longevity as a subculture, one of the most notable features of Goth is the persistence of the lifestyle and its associated identity beyond youth and even into the later years of life. In the previous chapters, I have mentioned informants in their thirties, forties, and even fifties, who are still actively engaged in the subculture. Such devotion would seem to clearly set Goth apart from the *bōsōzoku* studied by Sato (1991) and other youth-specific subcultures such as gal (*gyaru*)⁷¹ and especially Lolita (except, as my informants have shown, when it is associated with a more overarching Goth identity). I would posit, however, that Goth in Japan is part of an overall trend in Japan whereby subcultures are maintained even into later life, regardless of social consequences. BBC News, for instance, has reported, “Gal-mama are young mothers who refuse to shed their gal-ness,” continuing by saying that they are “an important sub-culture – and one that Japan’s government wants to exploit...it hopes to export four trillion yen (\$51bn; £32bn) worth of ‘Cool Japan’ fashion by 2020” (Oi 2012). Based on the information presented in the previous section, as well

⁷⁰ It should be noted that the Japanese word *majo* (魔女) does not carry as much of a negative connotation in Japan as in most Western countries, and witches are frequently featured as young and cute characters in anime such as Hayao Miyazaki’s popular 1989 animated feature *Kiki’s Delivery Service* (*Majo no Takkyūbin*, 魔女の宅急便).

⁷¹ A transliteration of the English “girl,” gal or *gyaru* is a broad fashion subculture with numerous subcategories that are characterized by heavily bleached and dyed hair, loud accessories, and dramatic makeup. They are also often associated with juvenile delinquency or rejection of social norms.

as the general attitudes toward Goth fashion presented in Chapter 1 and elsewhere, it is difficult to imagine that Japan's government would be quite as enthusiastic in its promotion of Goth subculture, at least not in the "authentic" form espoused by my informants. What are the implications of Goths refusing to shed their "Goth-ness?"

For some, perhaps, it is a simple question of maintaining a balance between a job that requires a conventional appearance and one's subcultural identity. My informant Seiichirō uses wigs and temporary body art to assume the appearance he desires at subcultural events and live performances with his band. Doing this allows him to maintain his job and family life, and also to use public baths and other facilities that would be barred to him should he choose to engage in more permanent body modifications. Another Goth in his forties told me, upon my surprise at seeing him for the first time in a regular business suit rather than his usual Goth garments, told me that the professional attire he currently donned was actually cosplay – in other words, his Goth appearance was his real self, and he was only pretending to be a businessperson during the day. Another case of this subcultural/professional bifurcation was a certain dentist who would set up shop at Goth events. During the day he ran his dental practice as usual, but on weekends he often attended late-night Goth events, using professional dental materials to create custom-made fangs for event patrons for a nominal fee, which proved to be immensely popular. For him, no transformation was necessary. He simply showed up in his white lab coat with his equipment and he blended in as a kind of mad scientist type, often with a sexy young Goth "nurse" as an assistant. Not only did he accumulate Goth capital as a popular fixture of subcultural events, but he also translated such capital into financial capital – all while maintaining his day job as a dentist.

For others, especially many of my younger female informants, the balance was not so easily struck. In the Introduction, I brought up the story of Ai, a 23-year-old woman who has become increasingly involved in Goth subculture ever since I first met her. Starting off as an attendee, she eventually started modeling in the fetish shows that were a feature of one particular Goth event. Later, she learned the ropes of being a DJ and also modeled for a PVC fashion brand, eventually going on to host some of her own small-scale Goth events. In the meantime, she has lived with her parents and, given the fact that she has only a high-school education, has worked miscellaneous part-time jobs. Although she initially worked at a pharmacy run by her father, she has since taken on the less socially acceptable job as a hostess in a cabaret club (*kyabakura*). Night work, or *mizu-shōbai* (literally, “the water trade”), in Japan is often associated with sex work and, although it is an essential part of the economy, experience working there could have detrimental effects in terms of future employment or marriageability. In the course of my time in Japan’s Goth subculture, I encountered many younger and older women who worked in such occupations, including hostess clubs, fetish/S&M bars, and other less reputable establishments. Most had only stayed in school through senior or junior high school, and thus their employment options were limited. Some told me they hoped to get married at some point, while others were confident that they would stay in the trade, possibly opening up their own bar or club in the future. For some it was merely a temporary way of making quick and (relatively) easy cash through a job with a flexible schedule, but judging from the range of ages and years of employment, it would seem that what was meant to be a temporary employment became much more permanent for some. That is not to say that Goth is the only subculture that has ties to night work, as *gyaru* women may also be just as likely to participate in the trade. However, given the fact that

events center on bars and clubs from late in the evening until early in the morning, not to mention that there are dedicated and self-proclaimed Goth and fetish bars that employ women in the subculture, it would seem that there is a high degree of affinity between the subculture and such businesses.

Those who work in such temporary jobs, known as “freeters” in Japan, are typically viewed as being detrimental to the economy, although their spending power has been viewed in a positive light as well. Even when not involved in *mizu-shōbai*, I found that many of the female Goths that I spoke to put off marriage to a late age, or rejected it altogether. Two female Goths in their late thirties that were single and living in Japan when I first met them are now married to non-Japanese and living abroad, one in Sweden and another in France. Hikaru (mentioned in Chapter 1), at the age of forty-two, is still single and living alone in Tokyo with no intentions of getting married. Hired out by a temp agency to various companies in a clerical capacity, her income is spent mostly on pursuing her Goth interests and traveling to London whenever she has the chance in order to enjoy the more “authentic” Goth subculture to be found there.

On the male side of Japan’s Goth subculture spectrum, I found a relatively higher percentage of those who were married or living with their partners. Aside from management or bartending positions, *mizu-shōbai* jobs are for the most part limited to females, and any negative stigma attached to the trade is largely one-sided. I have heard a Japanese woman lament her son’s position working at an *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub), but it seems clear that a daughter working as a hostess or mistress in a night-time establishment might be cause for considerably more parental misgivings. Instead of night work, I found that men who did not have regular employment with a company were likely to hold down part-time positions with moving companies (as

was the case for one of my DJ informants) or other jobs that required more manual labor (a prominent event organizer I met told me that he worked as an electrician, having previously worked for a moving company). It would seem that, largely, the gendered division of roles was perpetuated within Goth subculture in Japan.

The implications of Goth appearance also differ by gender in various ways. For instance, something as simple as long hair that can be styled in various elaborate ways is a standard feature of Goth style. Female informants, due to the gendered expectations of hair length, were able to take advantage of this, some even taking on more extreme styles such as Mohican (or Mohawk) hair cuts with the sides of their heads shaved. Megumi revealed that she had a deathhawk⁷² haircut, and was able to cover the shaven sides with the longer hair above. For men, however, this is not an option, and Seiichirō told me that he used a wig during performances to effectively hide his shorter, professional hairstyle. This contrasts with my own observations in the US, where slightly longer hair, so long as it is neatly trimmed or tied back, could be acceptable in some salaried company jobs. Piercings are also more acceptable for women, and can sometimes be hidden by hair, which makes it easier for them to engage in this form of body modification. In terms of making them ineligible for certain careers, body modifications such as tattoos and implants seem to have equally serious consequences across genders. Arriving at one's workplace in Japan with a tongue split down the middle is not likely to be overlooked for reasons of one's gender.

In terms of class, as noted earlier, Goth in the U.S. and Europe has been noted as being predominantly middle-class, and Spooner (2006) also points out stereotypes in the media, saying that "one characteristic set of media responses labels the

⁷² A deathhawk is a variety of Mohican or Mohawk where small sections of hair are left unshaven at the sides of the head in front of the ears.

subculture as comically pretentious, self-indulgent and middle-class" (94). My examples above, however, might seem to indicate that Goth in Japan has the potential to draw potentially middle-class men and especially women into jobs that have little to no future. A woman who is involved in night work, particularly one who has tattoos or other forms of body modification, may find it difficult to marry upward or get a job when they become too old for such professions (although some do continue to become owners of night work establishments). Is Goth luring young people away from education and successful careers into questionable body modification practices and manual labor or sexualized work that offers no future security? To answer this, I would point to two groups of my informants: those who make a living within the subculture, and those who do not. For those who do make a living within the subculture, I have found that those like my informant Ai (mentioned in the Introduction), who did not attend university and chose eventually to work in a hostess club, Goth was discovered relatively late in their high school years or after they had graduated. It would seem that her direction in life was decided by the circumstances of her family and lack of higher education (most likely decided by class), and Goth subculture and a job in Japan's *mizu-shōbai* (which, while not located within the subculture, allowed her to engage in Goth) simply offered an alternative route to success and fulfillment outside of traditional values. It was rather their work in hostess clubs or fetish bars, which many had been channeled into by discrimination in education and employment, that enabled them to be involved in Goth subculture more freely compared to those who were forced to balance between mainstream careers and their private predilections. For those who do not make a living in the subculture, it seems that balancing the subculture with work is not a problem. Someone like Megumi, who found Goth in high school and eventually started a band, works as a

civil servant, and Seiichirō balances a professional job and family with his own band. Takashi (mentioned in previous chapters) also works as a chief manager at a major retail chain while performing in Goth events with his band and as a DJ. Yūko (introduced in Chapter 1) actually offers a case of a tattooed Goth who, with a junior college education, went from working as a dating site shill to a job in an IT company. The life trajectories of Goths in Japan are multifarious, and I believe that it would also be inaccurate to peg subcultural participation as a poor alternative to more traditional views of success. Amid rising unemployment rates, economic stagnation, and uncertainty for the future, it is perhaps little wonder that individuals in Japan today may choose the fulfillment and relative freedom of subcultural participation. Unlike the freeters and NEETs that cause such a stir among those concerned about Japan's social and economic situation, all but one⁷³ of the Goths I spoke with worked to support themselves, often in ways that allowed them creative expression.

Nonetheless, while "Goth for life" was expressed as possible and also desirable for all of the informants that I questioned, various legal and social implications still exist in Japan for such an identity choice, complicating the situation for many of those who find fulfillment in such pursuits.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the implications that Goth subculture has in Japan, particularly with regard to how Goth capital can result in subsequent reduction of mainstream cultural or social capital. As evidenced by recent news reports, the issue of prejudice against tattoos and other forms of body adornment is a highly current one, and has implications in terms of the acceptance of cultural

⁷³ This individual was having difficulties finding a job due to a learning disability (which caused difficulties in acquiring various skills), and was working to gain credentials for employment when we spoke.

diversity in Japan. Moreover, for the Goth informants that I interviewed, the decision of whether or not to be inked or have other forms of body modification was always a significant one, and done with the full knowledge that there would be certain inconveniences or even sacrifices involved. Their choice to engage in bodily and sartorial choices that could alienate them from certain types of employment, public facilities, or even marriage partners, can be understood in terms of the positive benefits that they gained from them as described in previous chapters. However, they can also be considered a part of a more macro trend toward disillusionment with marriage and more permanent employment with large companies as ideal life goals worthy of pursuit. The continuous stagnation of the Japanese economy since the 1990s, the turbulent political situation that has seen seven changes of prime minister since 2006, the aftermath of Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and the ongoing Fukushima nuclear disaster, are all factors contributing to an increasing sense of uncertainty about the future in Japan. Tensions with its neighbors in Asia and a population crisis stemming from its aging population are also major sources of anxiety for the country. In such a climate, it is little wonder that subcultures like Goth are thriving in the underground, just as the punk and early Goth subcultures did in the 1970s and 1980s. It should also be no cause for amazement to know that those who choose to drop out of the rat race amid economic stagnation, high unemployment, and disillusionment with marriage as an institution are choosing to find success in subcultural outlets. For those who are socioeconomically marginalized, particularly women, subcultural employment offers an attractive option of financial independence, and the built-in night work in Japan's Goth subculture (S&M and fetish bars, etc.) makes it possible for such women to gain financial and subcultural capital simultaneously. For my Goth informants that hold down mainstream jobs, however,

the fact that legal proscriptions and stigmas against body modification and dressing in ways that are not considered socially acceptable for one's age still exist means that their subcultural pursuits are still a delicate balancing act.

It is the expansive and polymorphous nature of Goth – encompassing music, fashion, literature, film, art, and philosophy/religion – that makes it such an enduring subcultural identity. Even if some aspects are diminished or lost (such as elaborate fashion), the identity of Goth still persists as individuals pursue their darker inclinations in various avenues of entertainment. Permanent forms of body modification also prevent the identity of Goth from being an ephemeral phenomenon of youth, and in the following Conclusion I will summarize the broad-based implications of Goth subculture in Japan and hypothesize the future directions it will take.

Conclusion

Across the introduction and four chapters of this study, I have presented findings based on the words of twenty members of Japan's Goth subculture in the cities of Tokyo and Osaka, and numerous others that I observed in the subterranean clubs and other establishments that cater to those with darker predilections. Although Goth is a relatively small subculture in Japan, its fashion and music are prominent in popular culture, and aspects such as fashion and music have bled into the mainstream in forms such as visual kei and Gothic Lolita. It also draws in people of all genders, sexual orientations, and classes, from teenagers to those who are nearing retirement age. From my very first encounter with Goth subculture in Japan, I wondered what exactly made the UK-originated Goth subculture so attractive to its participants there. This question plunged me into a long and winding journey down the rabbit hole, one that has taken me from the smoke-filled underground of live houses in Tokyo to the decadent fetish clubs of Osaka and Kobe. The discoveries that I made there have implications that go beyond the small Goth community and extend to subcultures in Japan as a whole, reflecting the changing circumstances of the search for identity and meaning in that society.

Goth in Japan: Two Negatives Equal a Positive?

One question that has been in the back of my mind throughout my research was, "How is Goth in Japan different from what I have experiences in the U.S. and Europe?" Throughout this paper I have attempted to distinguish between Goth in Japan and Goth in the U.S. and other countries, even though they are, on the surface at least, quite similar. I discussed with European and American club-goers in Tokyo,

and found that they were surprised by the high presence of fetish and S&M elements in Japanese clubs (which would often be separated into separate events elsewhere). Some commented on the high level of effort that many Japanese participants put into their intricate makeup, hairstyles, and outfits, while others claimed to feel a warmth and camaraderie that was absent in their native countries' Goth clubs. I also noticed a considerable amount of fusion of events that would normally be separate. For example, one night might include DJ sets featuring music spanning several decades, a noise band, and a Japanese rope-binding S&M performance. This may be attributed to the small nature of the subculture, since it may not be possible to draw in sufficient crowds for events that cater to niche genres of music. The differences listed above are all superficial, and it was only through in-depth interviews with my twenty informants that I was able to get at some of the more significant differences, which I will now reiterate.

First of all, for my informants in Japan, Goth represented a foreign, exotic subculture. While Goths in Europe and the US may often pursue a romanticized vision of the past with neo-Victorian attire and a passion for Gothic literature, Goths in Japan are more likely to be attracted to Goth because it is not Japanese. Informants like Kiyoka refused to watch Japanese horror films or listen to Japanese music, instead adhering strictly to "authentic" Western Goth. While slightly less rigid in their attitude toward Japan's indigenous forms of Goth, informants such as Yoshiki and Takashi still professed a desire to see younger fans become familiar with the roots of Goth. Yūko may serve as another example here, as her comments about Japan's "restrictive" culture of conformity were directly related to her turn to Goth. Of course, there are any number of non-Japanese subcultures and subcultural identities available

in the global cultural supermarket, and so there must be other reasons behind their turn to Goth.

Through my exploration of Goth, one main point that I have focused on is the way in which its “dark,” morbid, and sinister trappings are sources of fulfillment for my informants. The color black, which, while fashionable, can have associations with mourning and death, and the deathly white makeup, skulls, crucifixes, spikes, and other ghoulish accessories all combine to create an impression of Thanatos. Adding to this is the presence of body modifications – acts that alter the body for artistic purposes – such as piercings, tattoos, and implants, which could be viewed as self-destructive and unhealthy. I have pointed out that Goth fashion, due to its portrayal in popular culture in Japan, can be associated with escapism, social maladjustment, and even violent behavior, which also resonates with stereotypes of Goth in the U.S. and Europe and studies that have linked Goth with self-harm behavior.

When I interviewed my informants, I did indeed find people who had had negative experiences in their lives that they directly tied to their turn to Goth. My informant Megumi told me she felt alienated and isolated from the social circles around her in her Japanese high school. Yūko expressed her dissatisfaction with the perceived conformity of Japanese society around her and broke away from it through her fashion and tattoos. Informants like Yoshiki and Mai, on the other hand, had encounters with religion in their youth and thus turned away from the perceived artificiality and controlling nature of such organizations by embracing Western occult and Satanic imagery as symbols of rebellion and freethinking. The small percentage of professed Christians and low degree of recognition for occult symbols in Japan makes Satanic and occult trappings exotic and unusual, while still relatable. Takashi’s Byronic views of Satan as a heroic rebel are a case in point. On the other hand, in the

case of Mai, who had negative experiences with a homegrown Japanese religion, the Western occult was all the more attractive for not being Japanese. For such individuals, Goth fashion, music, and the occult represent a way of embracing negative feelings of difference and alienation from their own society in Japan and turning them into sources of empowerment.

The acquisition of subcultural capital, while reliant to some degree on the policing of subcultural tastes to differentiate Goth from fashion and music genres like Gothic Lolita and visual kei, was an important part of my informants' lives in the subculture, as they found a place to belong and meet friends with whom they could share their aesthetic sense. Moving beyond mere musical tastes and fashion in terms of clothing, I inquired into the thoughts of my informants who were involved in various forms of body modification. As mentioned in Chapter 3, all but one of my twenty informants had some kind of body modification, and more than one-quarter had tattoos. Piercings and tattoos, while within the realm of common body modifications, can still be perceived as deviant, especially depending upon their placement. My informant Kiyoka described her tattoos as a way of sublimating her emotions and accepting both the positive negative within herself. She claimed that, in the past, she would have fits of anger and lash out at those around her. Since her discovery of an identity in the form of Goth, however, she indicates that she has come to terms with her feelings and found a focus in seeking to learn more about Goth and Western occultism. As Pitts has pointed out, particularly for women, body modification can be an act of "reclaiming the body" in a form of symbolic control and self-transformation. She writes, "Reclaiming the body is presented as a process of highlighting the power relations that surround the body, and undergoing painful, often emotional ritual to transform the self-body relationship" (2003, 56-57). In other

words, the physical act of voluntarily altering one's body can be a way of asserting the primacy of self in a situation that seems completely out of one's control, such as family difficulties or the vicissitudes of one's own emotions, thus strengthening the relationship between the body and self in a very corporeal and tangible way.

I also found informants who engaged in more extreme forms of body modification, and it wasn't always necessarily such a self-conscious process of self-transformation. Viewed from an outsider's perspective, the act of putting needles through one's flesh to achieve dramatic blood flow, or having large hooks inserted into one's body and then being hoisted up into the air in front of an audience, may appear to be symptoms of self-destructive tendencies, exhibitionism, and possible mental imbalance. However, informants like Mayumi and Saya, who participated in blood play and suspension performances, seemed to embrace the practices for their autotelic nature. Instead of finding the "mentally sick" people described by my informant Akira, I found people who were engaging in a hobby that was autotelic and fulfilling for them. Although I am not qualified for psychiatric evaluations of my informants, it is my belief that engaging in such body modification performances for fun and enjoyment (conducted by an experienced professional under sanitary conditions) is much healthier than resorting to self-harm or substance abuse when in the throes of depression. My informant Akira insisted on striving toward a "healthier" body modification scene, and I was impressed with the thoroughly hygienic appearance of his facilities and the extremely detailed explanations that he gave to his customers who came to undergo various procedures. Control over the body, whether for autotelic or ritualistic purposes, could be seen as an attempt to reclaim the last territory that an individual can call his or her own: the body itself. In a world where we find our personalities increasingly diffused into the cyber domain of Internet

SNSs, as I quoted Spooner saying in Chapter 3, “it could be argued that contemporary Gothic’s preoccupation with freaks, scars, diseased flesh... and, above all, blood is an attempt to reinstate the physicality of the body in an increasingly decorporealized information society” (2007, 63).

It is clear that Goth identity is just one choice available from the global cultural supermarket as described by Mathews, and it is on the third level where people believe that they have the freedom to choose their own identities. However, Mathews is also emphatic in pointing out that such freedom is largely an illusion, and our choices are defined by the availability of identities and the cultural shaping that we have received to form the two deeper levels of our cultural identity (the “taken-for-granted level” and “*shikata ga nai* level”). While I hesitate to posit any statement that smacks of an essentialist notion of Goth identity as an underlying personality trait, I would venture to say that, based on the words of my informants, their experiences in life with alienation and isolation may have predisposed them toward embracing an identity like Goth, which embraces being an outsider and encourages difference from social and cultural norms. The fact that it is originally a non-Japanese subculture adds to its exotic appeal and, I argue, makes it an attractive choice for those who already feel somewhat marginalized from the social circles around them.

The question that might be asked then is similar to that of the chicken and the egg. Did these individuals in Japan discover Goth because their cultural molding and personal experiences of alienation and other life problems made them predisposed to that subcultural identity as a solution, or is the Goth identity a contributing cause to their maladjustment and a mere distraction that keeps them from seeking more socially sanctioned options, such as normative social relationships and, perhaps, psychiatric help, to deal with their issues? In light of my research, I would argue for

the former. In most cases, Goth is an aesthetic choice that, particularly in Japan, where fashion is often accepted at face value without moralistic judgment, has few social repercussions. However, as the stories of some of my informants have shown, Goth subculture can be, if anything, a symptom, rather than a cause, of feelings of alienation and isolation, and offers a source of fulfillment and meaning for such individuals in Japan. Nonetheless, in terms of body modification and the enduring nature of the Goth identity even into late adulthood, as well as the preponderance of individuals (especially women) involved in *mizu-shōbai*, there are wider implications of the subculture that must be considered in my conclusion.

The Wider Implications of Goth in Japan

Although my overall view of Goth subculture in Japan is as a positive outlet for individuals to find meaningful identities and fulfillment, this view is also complicated by the fact that there can be serious consequences for some of the more permanent kinds of subcultural capital that are involved in the subculture, such as body modification. As discussed in Chapter 4, body modifications, especially tattoos, can have unfortunate repercussions for those who find enjoyment and fulfillment in such activities. It has been hypothesized that, in Japan, Shinto ideas of purity from pollution, fused with Confucian ideas about keeping the body healthy and intact because it is a gift from one's parents, have contributed to an especially strong stigma against such modifications (Miller 2006, 86). As a result of this and associations with crime, individuals with tattoos are often barred from entering public hot springs and baths, gyms, beaches, and even some restaurants, and can face discrimination in terms of employment and even seeking insurance. For women, body modification can also damage marriage prospects. The conflation of tattoos with criminal behavior and drug

use is still strong in Japan, despite the long history of the art that has been described as “loved abroad, hated at home,” by Jon Mitchell in the title of a March 3, 2014, Japan Times article.

Not all Goths in Japan have tattoos, although the number seems to be growing (more than a quarter of my informants are inked). Another concern involves the kinds of professions that are open to those with unusual appearances. Dyed hair, piercings, tattoos, and other forms of modification can block entry into more professional or service industry careers. So, is Goth creating a generation of losers who, because of their chosen cultural identities, are unable to achieve mainstream success in Japan? I would make three points to argue against this. First, I have found in my participant observation that hostess and cabaret clubs are not necessarily the last haven for social dropouts, as I have met hostesses who worked part-time while attending prestigious universities. Second, my informants such as Megumi (a civil servant) and Seiichirō (an IT company employee with a family) prove that Goths can compromise and find a balance between their subcultural identities and more traditional career and family lives. Third, and most importantly, the informants that I found in jobs involved in night work (usually women) or manual labor (usually men) had already had their fate sealed, so to speak, by their lack of higher education, which indicates that their socioeconomic mobility was neither upward nor downward; rather, they were simply remaining static. This lines up with the argument about class tracking in education and the replication of class ecology and class culture posited by Yoder (2004). My informant Ai (described in the Introduction) may serve as a salient example of this last point.

As stated at the outset of this paper, Ai started off working part-time for a pharmacy owned by her father, was lured by the high pay and flexible working hours

of night work (*mizu-shōbai*), and now works as a hostess at a cabaret club. Working at this nighttime establishment, Ai entertains male guests by talking with them, pouring drinks for them, and lighting their cigarettes. Her work there will not serve as experience for future careers outside of *mizu-shōbai* (at least none that could be given on a typical CV), and she will have less chance of maintaining such a job as she ages (since such positions are founded, for the most part, on youthful beauty). When she told me she didn't think about the future and would be "Goth for life," some might say that she was dooming herself to a life of unsteady and objectifying night work and uninspiring marriage prospects, and that such would likely be the case for many young women and men who choose to pursue Goth subculture in Japan. However, in my interview I discovered that she had discovered the Goth subculture only after high school, and thus it seemed to have no bearing on her choice to not attend university. When I asked what her parents thought about her Goth lifestyle and current job situation, she said, "Oh, [they] don't mind. When I'm riding in the car with my mom and we want to listen to music, sometimes she'll even request Marilyn Manson! She's a really funky⁷⁴ mom." Given the fact that her parents did not force her to attend university and seem content with her current life course, it would seem that Ai's path in life was decided in many ways by her family and education, rather than her turn to Goth (which occurred when she was in high school).

Although it is difficult to generalize, I found that my pool of informants generally reflected the observation that Goth subculture did not change the course of someone's life in terms of career, except in the cases where people made their living entirely within the subculture. In those cases, I found a high degree of fulfillment. Zin (leader of the band Madame Edwarda is an excellent example, as someone who

⁷⁴ In this case, "funky" means stylish or hip. Although it has fallen into relative disuse in the U.S., this word is sometimes used as a Japanese English adjective (*fankī na*) to refer to someone who is hip in spite of expectations (e.g., a "funky mother" or "funky older sister").

graduated from Waseda University (one of Japan's top institutions) and lives off of his music and various freelance work at a level comparable to what might be expected had he pursued a more mainstream career. He lives alone in a rented apartment, and appears to have a comfortable lifestyle, holding Goth events frequently and often performing with his band to a loyal fan base. Informants like Ai, Kaori, and Hitomi (all night workers) also appeared satisfied with their work, as it allowed them to participate in Goth subculture while also achieving financial and social independence. In the case of fetish and S&M bars, the workplaces were also subcultural spaces, thus encouraging and even requiring Goth fashion and body modification as prerequisites to work there. Those who did not make a living in the subculture, such as Megumi and Seiichirō, were able to balance their work and family lives while still attending events and even performing in their own bands. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that, while painted in bright shades (of black) by my informants, the Goth lifestyle could be viewed as a negative influence in terms of achieving the traditional ideals in Japan marriage, having a family, and salaried, full-time employment. How attractive these crumbling ideals are to my informants is a question only they can answer, but their choice of Goth from the global (sub)cultural supermarket should serve as a clear indication.

Goth for Life

The self-proclaimed Goths that I interviewed and interacted with during my research in Japan are, no doubt, relatively small in number. However, I believe that various aspects of Goth extend not only into other subcultures in Japan, but popular culture as well, Gothic Lolita fashion, visual kei music, and even anime, manga, and video games – all of these can have aspects of Goth subculture, not to mention the

heavy overlap of Goth with fetish, S&M, and BDSM scenes, as well as body modification. Goth is especially useful because it encompasses various aspects that can only be found separately in other groups, and yet still has a kind of cohesive identity. Thus, when I studied Goth, I found that I was studying various aspects of other Japanese subcultures as well. Also, unlike other subcultures that are centered on youth, deviance, and fashion consumption among young women, Goth spans generations, includes men, women, and transgender individuals, and is not limited by class. I believe that, since Goth subculture in Japan transcends all of these categories, it may be saying something about subcultures as a whole in Japan – as the values of previous generations are sloughed off by the young in the face of tumultuous changes in Japan’s society, we may see more and more people turning toward alternative identities and fulfillment in subcultures. These factors make Goth an ideal subculture to study in Japan, and its lifelong identity offers the possibility of longitudinal research of Goths and, by extension, Japan’s subcultures into the future.

In conclusion, I have found that Goth subculture offers an alternative sense of identity for those who are faced with a rat race of education, job searching, and marriage hunting that may not offer the rewards that were afforded previous generations in Japan. This is reflective of a general disillusionment with traditional values of success that do not hold the same attractiveness as they might for others. While other subcultures studied in Japan, such as *bōsōzoku* and even Gothic Lolita, entail an obligatory “role exit” or graduation upon entry into adulthood (Sato 1991, Gagné 2013), Goth subculture in Japan offers a more permanent identity to be chosen from the global cultural supermarket that is not entirely incompatible with a career and family, but also offers a certain amount of escape from traditional social pressures that do not adequately reflect the uncertain realities faced by individuals in Japan in

our current age. The implications of lifelong identity and permanent body modification, due to the high conformance to lifestyle ideals in Japan's society and a deeply entrenched resistance to such modification, make Goth particularly salient as small but growing subculture Despite its sinister appearance, however, the ironic stance of "enjoying the you that is sick" of Goth seems to be an essential coping mechanism that allows such individuals to embrace the conflicting emotions swirling around inside of them and continue living with an identity that provides a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that may not otherwise be readily available to them, particularly in the confines of Japan's schools, workplaces, and homegrown religions. The escape from Japan's conformity while still feeling the comfort of belonging to a defined group makes Goth especially attractive to them. It also provides a subcultural space for already marginalized individuals, such as young men and especially women whose socioeconomic class has barred them from the educational credentials necessary for socially respectable employment and marriage that may or not lead to a secure livelihood. Goth subculture and night work are intrinsically interlinked in Japan, and it is my belief that, as the numbers of socially or socioeconomically marginalized individuals rise in Japan's increasingly uncertain economy and society, Goth may provide an example of how subcultures may take on a more important role in how people find fulfillment in their employment. Although it is my belief that subcultural identities, such as that of Goth, have always been a part of any society, as Japan faces economic and demographic crises in the future, the turn toward subcultures may become even more pronounced, and the implications for Japan's society will necessarily be different. Where will young people like Ai be in the next ten or twenty years? We can only wait and see, and I hope to follow up on this study in the future through further research. The ultimate implications of the trend toward

subcultural participation remain to be seen, but as its more than thirty-year history and the rising number of Goth events in Tokyo and Osaka would seem to proclaim, Goth is here to stay in Japan for some time.

Appendix

Table 1

Table 1 – Social Profile of Informants						
Name	Sex	Age	Marital Status/Living Arrangements	Highest Education Completed	Current Job	Goth Subcultural Activities
Saya	Female	23	Single	Senior High School	Bartender	Attendee, performer
Kaori	Female	24	Single/with partner	Senior High School	Fetish bar worker, warehouse packer	Attendee
Mai	Female	24	Married/with husband	Bachelor's Degree	Trading Company Employee (Full-Time)	Attendee
Riria*	Female	24	Single	Senior High School	Fashion Designer/Shop Owner	Fashion designer, event organizer
Ai	Female	25	Single/with family	Senior High School	Cabaret Club Hostess	DJ, fetish show model, event organizer, event staff
Megumi	Female	25	Single	Art School Degree	Civil Servant (Full-Time)	Bandleader
Kiyoka	Female	28	Single/with family	Senior High School	Sales Company Employee (Full-Time)	Attendee
Hitomi	Female	29	Single	Junior College	Fetish bar worker	Attendee, performer
Misaki	Female	29	Single/with partner	Senior High School	Unemployed	Attendee
Akira	Male	36	Single	Senior High School	Body Modification Artist (Piercing, Etc.)/Shop Owner	DJ, event organizer, body modification show performer (suspension, etc.), piercing shop owner
Mayumi	Female	37	Single/with family	Junior College	Sales Clerk (Full-Time)	Attendee
Takashi	Male	38	Married/with wife	Senior High School	Chief Manager of Record Store (Full-Time)	DJ, bandleader
<u>Yoshiki</u>	Male	40	Single/with partner	Senior High School	Undisclosed	DJ, band member
Kumiko	Female	42	Single	Junior College	Fashion Designer	DJ, event organizer
Yūko	Female	42	Single	Junior College	IT Company Employee (Full-Time)	DJ
Keroppy*	Male	48	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Journalist, Writer, Photographer, Editor	Writer, photographer, promoter
Midori*	Female	48	Single/with partner and two children	Senior High School	Fetish Bar Owner	Event organizer, fetish show performer (<i>kinbaku</i> artist)
Zin*	Trans-sexual	48	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Freelance (DJ, Band, Etc.)	DJ, bandleader, event organizer
Seiichirō	Male	52	Married/with wife and two children	Bachelor's Degree	IT Company Employee (Full-Time)	Attendee, band member (metal band)
Genet*	Male	55	Married/with wife and one child	Bachelor's Degree	Undisclosed	Bandleader, event organizer

Note: Names are given in order of age from youngest to oldest. Names marked with (*) are pseudonyms given by the informants and used with permission, while all other names are pseudonyms that I have chosen arbitrarily. Some details have been altered to protect the anonymity of my informants.

Table 2

Table 2 – Numbers of Informants with Body Modifications			
Type of Body Modification	Number of informants with body modification	Male (including one transsexual)	Female
Ear piercing	19	6	13
Ear stretching	3	2	1
Facial piercing (including tongue)	7	3	4
Tattoo (including UV ink)*	6	3	3
Transdermal implants	3	2	1
Subdermal implants	2	2	0
Scarification	2	1	1
Experience with suspension	4	2	2
Experience with blood play	2	0	2

* Only one informant had UV tattoos, which are supposed to be invisible except under ultraviolet light. As he showed me, however, the ink was still visible to a certain degree even in normal lighting conditions.

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